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FINAL SALUTE

MANMOHAN CREMATED WITH STATE HONOURS

Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck pays last respects to former prime minister Manmohan Singh, in New Delhi **PHOTOS: PTI**

Singh's funeral pyre was lit by his eldest daughter, Upinder Singh, at Nigambodh Ghat

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Former prime minister Manmohan Singh, who led India to the path of economic liberalisation in the 1990s, was cremated with full state honours here on Saturday in the presence of top dignitaries from the country and abroad.

Singh's funeral pyre was lit by his eldest daughter, Upinder Singh, at the Nigambodh Ghat as family members, friends and dignitaries bid farewell to the reformist former prime minister.

President Droupadi Murmu, the supreme commander of the armed forces, led the nation in paying last respects to the departed leader.

Priests and family members recited religious hymns from the holy Gurbani, while chants of "Satnam Waheguru" filled the air, as Singh was cremated according to Sikh rituals.

Before Singh's mortal remains were consigned to flames, the security forces gave a salute of three volleys of small arms and the buglers sounded the "Last Post" as a mark of honour for the former prime minister.

At the Nigambodh Ghat, a sense of deep grief united the assembly featuring Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union ministers and senior Congress leaders, including party president Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and the foreign minister of Mauritius, Dhananjay Ramful, were among the foreign dignitaries who paid tributes to Singh, who served as the prime minister from 2004 to 2014.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla also paid their last tributes to the former prime minister and laid wreaths on his mortal remains.

Several chief ministers, including Siddaramaiah (Karnataka), Revanth Reddy (Telangana), Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu (Himachal Pradesh) and Atishi (Delhi), besides Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, also attended the last rites of Singh.

Former chief ministers Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Ashok Gehlot and Bhupesh Baghel were also present, apart from All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretaries K C Venugopal, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Jairam Ramesh, Randeep Surjewala and several former Union ministers.

A seven-day national mourning is being observed as a mark of respect to the former prime minister during which the national flag will be flown at half-mast across the nation, the Union home ministry has announced. —*PTI*

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Cong leaders Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi along with K'taka CM Siddaramaiah and DyCM DK Shivakumar pay their last respects to ex-PM Dr Manmohan Singh, in New Delhi **PHOTO: SALAR**

Congress, BJP spar over last rites of Manmohan

NEW DELHI/ BHUBANESWAR, 28 DEC

Congress on Saturday accused the Centre of insulting Manmohan Singh, the country's first Sikh prime minister, by carrying out his last rites at the Nigambodh Ghat instead of a designated spot that could later become his memorial.

As politics over the matter erupted, the Centre said a decision to set up a memorial has already been taken and a trust would be formed to identify the place soon.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said the great son of Mother India and the first prime minister from the Sikh community has been "totally insulted" by the BJP-led Centre by performing his last rites at the Nigambodh Ghat.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said by not providing an appropriate place the Centre has not done justice to the dignity of the post, his personality, legacy and the self-respecting Sikh community.

Meanwhile, BJP accused Congress and Gandhi of "indulging in politics" over the funeral and alleged that the party has "insulted" its own leaders, including former prime minister PV Narasimha Rao, in the past.

BJP National Spokesperson and MP Sambit Patra alleged that Rahul had himself disrespected Singh by publicly tearing down a Cabinet note.

He alleged that the Congress has a history of insulting prime ministers who were not from the Nehru-Gandhi family. —*PTI*

> "Be it the right to education, right to food, right to employment, and right to transparency...he brought many revolutions
>
> —DK Shivakumar, Karnataka DyCM

Kabul targets Pak in retaliation for deadly airstrikes

KABUL, 28 DEC

Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said Saturday that its forces hit several points inside Pakistan in retaliation for deadly airstrikes last week. Pakistan last Tuesday launched an operation to destroy a training facility and kill insurgents in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province. The strikes killed dozens of people, mostly women and children. Taliban Defence Ministry said on X, "Several points beyond the hypothetical line, serving as centres and hideouts for malicious elements and their supporters who organised and coordinated attacks in Afghanistan, were targeted in retaliation from the southeastern direction of the country." —*PTI*

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Manipur: Bandh over arrest of armed men disrupts life

IMPHAL, 28 DEC

Daily life in five districts across Imphal Valley faced significant disruption on Saturday due to a bandh initiated over the arrest of six armed individuals and the fatality of one in a police shootout on 14 December.

Commercial establishments remained shuttered, and public transport was virtually non-existent as supporters of the bandh, organised by the Joint Action Committee, took to the streets. Demonstrations included road blockades and tyre burning at Lamphel Sanakeithel in Imphal West. In neighbouring Bishnupur district, the protest escalated as some supporters vandalised vehicles still on the roads.

The 24-hour shutdown commenced at 6pm on Friday and received backing from various factions, including the students' and women's wings of the Coordination Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), which encompasses multiple Meitei civil society groups.

According to police reports, the six apprehended individuals and the deceased were allegedly affiliated with the banned outfit PREPAK, purportedly involved in extortion activities.

Authorities also recovered a significant cache of arms and ammunition, some believed to have been stolen from police armouries. —*PTI*

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Putin says sorry to Azerbaijani leader for plane crash tragedy

MOSCOW, 28 DEC

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday apologised to his Azerbaijani counterpart for what he called a "tragic incident" following the crash of an Azerbaijani airliner in Kazakhstan that killed 38 people.

The plane was flying on Wednesday from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, when it turned toward Kazakhstan and crashed while making an attempt to land. There were 29 survivors.

In an official statement Saturday, the Kremlin said air defence systems were firing near Grozny due to a Ukrainian drone strike as the plane attempted to land, but stopped short of saying one of these hit the plane.

According to a Kremlin readout of the call, Putin apologised to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev "for the fact that the tragic incident occurred in Russian airspace."

- According to a Kremlin readout of the call, Putin apologised to Azerbaijani President Ilham 'for fact that tragic incident occurred in Russian airspace.'

Friday's assessments by Rashan Nabiyev and White House national security spokesman John Kirby echoed those made by outside aviation experts who blamed the crash on Russian air defence systems responding to a Ukrainian attack. —*PTI*

SC gives Punjab time till 31 Dec to shift Dallewal to hospital

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

The Supreme Court has granted the Punjab government until 31 December to persuade farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal to receive medical treatment, amid growing concerns over his prolonged hunger strike lasting over a month.

The apex court came down heavily on the Punjab government for not shifting Dallewal, who has been fasting for over a month, to a hospital even as it doubted the intention of the agitating farmers for resisting availability of medical aid to their septuagenarian leader. —*PTI*

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Three killed in road accident as car overturns in M'luru

MANGALURU, 28 DEC

Three people lost their lives in a road accident early Saturday morning near Parladka in Puttur taluk of Dakshina Kannada district, police said. The incident occurred when the car overturned into a ditch, killing all three occupants, they said. According to the police, the car was travelling from Sullia to Punacha in Puttur when the accident occurred around 4.15 am. A preliminary inquiry suggests the driver dozed off, causing the vehicle to lose control and crash into the ditch. Puttur traffic police rushed to the scene, conducted an inspection, and registered a case. Further investigations are underway. —*PTI*

FESTIVE SECURITY

City cops heighten security for NY celebrations

BENGALURU, 28 DEC

With the New Year festivities approaching, the Bengaluru Police have implemented extensive security measures to ensure public safety during the celebrations. A total of 11,830 police personnel will be deployed across the city, particularly in high-footfall areas, to monitor for any potential disturbances, including rave parties and drug-related activities.

City Police Commissioner B Dayananda confirmed that New Year celebrations are permitted only until 1am, urging citizens to adhere to the specified time limits. He highlighted that preparations have been informed by incidents from previous years, allowing for improved security in areas likely to attract large gatherings like MG Road, Brigade Road, Koramangala, and Indiranagar.

City Police Commissioner B Dayananda confirmed that New Year celebrations are permitted only until 1am **PHOTO: PTI**

Coordinating with civic bodies such as the BBMP and local transport services, the police have arranged for adequate lighting and barricading. Special measures include a one-way pedestrian system on MG and Brigade Roads to prevent stampedes and manage crowd control.

To enhance safety, 'Safety Islands' staffed by women officers will be established at key locations, along with police kiosks for emergencies. Surveillance will be bolstered by 817 CCTV cameras and 63 observation towers to assist in crowd monitoring.

Regarding traffic management, the police have announced that from 11pm on 31 December until 6am on 1 January, all vehicles will be restricted on flyovers, except for the elevated expressway to KIA Airport. Motorists are required to remove their vehicles from certain streets by 4pm on 31 December to avoid penalties.

A strict stance against drinking and driving will be enforced, with checkpoints established throughout the night. The police have also cautioned against reckless driving, urging the public to report such behaviour via the helpline number 112. Residents are encouraged to use public transport to navigate the City. —*PTI*

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Delhi records 41.2 mm rain in 24 hrs, highest in 101 yrs

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

Delhi has recorded 41.2 mm of rain over the past 24 hours, until 8.30am on Saturday, marking the highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The capital's previous record for a single day in December was 75.7 mm, which occurred on 3 December 1923.

This unprecedented rainfall also positions December 2024 as the fifth-wettest December since records began in 1901. An IMD official noted, "The 24-hour cumulative rainfall recorded at Safdarjung is the second-highest since 1901. Furthermore, the monthly cumulative rainfall ranks fifth overall."

Residents of Delhi awoke to an overcast sky on Saturday, with the weather department forecasting continued light to moderate rain and issuing a yellow alert for the day. The current precipitation is attributed to an active western disturbance interacting with easterly winds, resulting in rain and thunderstorms across Northwest and Central India, including the Delhi-NCR region.

The minimum temperature for Saturday was recorded at 12.7 degrees Celsius, significantly above the seasonal average. —*PTI*

4 including bank manager held in cyber fraud case

BENGALURU, 28 DEC

In a major breakthrough, the City police arrested four individuals, including a bank manager from Gujarat, for allegedly stealing Rs 12.5 crore from a private firm in the city. Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda on Saturday explained that the accused had targeted CRED, a private firm based in Indiranagar, by gaining unauthorised access to its banking details. The gang reportedly exploited a linked email ID and mobile number to carry out the fraudulent activity. "The accused forged Corporate Internet Banking forms to transfer Rs 12.5 crore from the firm's bank account into 17 mule accounts," said Commissioner Dayananda during a press briefing. Police recovered Rs 1.28 crore in cash, fake CIB forms, two mobile phones, during the operation. They also managed to freeze Rs 55 lakh from the mule accounts used in the fraudulent transfers.—*Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Mysuru man kills father to claim ₹30L insurance

MYSURU, 28 DEC

A 27-year-old man allegedly killed his father to claim an insurance amount of Rs 30 lakh. The crime occurred in Dongri Gherosi Colony near Koppa in Periyapatna taluk. The accused, identified as Pandu, reportedly murdered his father, Annappa, 55, on 25 December by striking him on the head with a club in the backyard of their residence. He then disposed of the body on BM Road near Manchadevanahalli and filed a complaint with Bylakuppe Police, claiming his father had died in a road accident. Police shifted the body for postmortem, but contradictions in the report raised suspicions. Upon further investigation, Pandu confessed to the crime, revealing his motive was to claim the insurance amount. The accused was arrested and remanded to judicial custody on Friday.
—*SalarNews*

1 held for illegal Ksheera Bhagya powder storage

MYSURU, 28 DEC

Kollegal Town Police have arrested Nayaz Pasha for illegally stocking 90 kilograms of Ksheera Bhagya milk powder, which is intended for distribution to students in State-run schools. Acting on a tip-off, a police team led by PSI Harsha raided Pasha's petty shop in Idgah Mohalla layout, where the milk powder was seized. Pasha has been remanded to judicial custody, and a case has been registered by the Kollegal Town Police. Further investigations are underway.
—*SalarNews*

Mysuru temple to distribute 2L laddus on New Year

MYSURU, 28 DEC

Yoganarasimhaswamy Temple in Vijayanagar, Mysuru, is all set to distribute two lakh laddus to devotees on New Year's Day. This tradition, started in 1994, will continue for the 29th consecutive year, with preparations already underway. At a press conference on Saturday, the temple's founder, Nadoja Prof Bhashyam Swamiji, shared details about the distribution. A dedicated team of 60 expert cooks has been preparing the sweets since 20 December and is set to complete the task by 31 December. The distribution will include 15,000 large laddus weighing 2 kg each and 200,000 smaller laddus weighing 150 grams each. The preparation requires significant quantities of ingredients, including 100 quintals of besan flour, 200 quintals of sugar, 10,000 litres of edible oil, and a variety of nuts and spices such as cashews, raisins, almonds, and cardamom.
—*SalarNews*

Bombs, murders, and suicides mark K'taka's 2024

Politics, scandals, floods, and loss also defined the State this year

BENGALURU, 28 DEC

The bomb blast at Rameshwaram Cafe on 1 March stood out for Karnataka in a year that saw its share of twists in the script, particularly with weather and politics.

Initially, it was thought the blast at the popular eatery's Whitefield branch was caused by a gas leak. But it turned out to be an improvised explosive device (IED) blast, which injured at least eight people. By March 4, the National Investigation Agency took over the case, arresting two suspects.

Year 2024 also saw an acute dry spell in several parts of Karnataka. But the water crisis was more severe in Bengaluru. This was followed by a very wet rainy season that resulted in devastating floods and landslides, particularly in the coastal parts and Western Ghats of Karnataka.

The state witnessed 46 landslides in 2024, causing 12 related deaths, according to official figures.

Politically, too, the mood swung both ways, with BJP walking away with a lion's share of votes in the Lok Sabha elections in April, although its seats slipped from 25 in 2019 to 17. However, months later, in November, the ruling Congress swept all three Assembly bypolls that came as a relief to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah who otherwise had a challenging year, having to weather the Valmiki and MUDA 'scams.'

The bomb blast at Rameshwaram Cafe on 1 March stood out for Karnataka in a year that saw its share of twists in the script **PHOTO: PTI**

As is wont, politicians kept 2024 really busy. The most deeply felt news in Karnataka was perhaps the death of former Chief Minister and the man who transformed Bengaluru into a global hub, SM Krishna, on 10 December. People poured their hearts out in obituaries, bringing out his multi-faceted personality.

If Siddaramaiah was caught in a "resign now" turmoil first over the Valmiki 'scam' and then over the controversy surrounding the MUDA site allotment, former CM BS Yediyurappa was issued a non-bailable warrant in a POCSO case.

But it was former JD (S) MP Prajwal Revanna who stirred up the biggest controversy. Cases of sexual abuse involving Prajwal shocked the entire nation when pen drives containing explicit videos allegedly involving him were circulated in Hassan ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

In a plot twist, Kannada film industry's most talked about actor in 2024 was a murder suspect. Actor Darshan was arrested for allegedly murdering his fan, 33-year-old Renukaswamy on 11 June, along with his friend, actor Pavithra Gowda, and 15 others. But on 13 December, the actor – and the others – were given bail, and his fans celebrated it with the same fervour as his film releases.

Another death that had the whole country debating was that of 34-year-old software engineer Atul Subhash. —*PTI*

CREATING HISTORY

In a first, transperson joins K'taka Univ faculty

BALLARI, 28 DEC

With her appointment to Vijayanagara Sri Krishnadevaraya University, 27-year-old KN Renuka Pujar has likely become the first transgender person to be appointed as a guest lecturer at a university in Karnataka.

Pujar, who completed her post-graduation in Kannada at the University, joined its Kannada department at the Nandihalli campus (PG centre) earlier this month as a guest lecturer, varsity officials said.

"I'm very happy. After a lot of struggle, I have reached this stage. The university has helped me a lot. I completed my degree in 2018 and became transgender in 2017 when I was in my second year. I completed my MA in 2022 and am working as a guest lecturer," the resident of Kurugodu in Ballari district, told PTI.

Noting that she received support from her parents, which helped her reach this stage, Pujar said her family comes from an agricultural background, and her parents educated her to achieve in life.

This, they said, is likely the first such appointment at a university in the State, with Pujar serving as an inspiration for more trans people to get educated and reach prominent positions in society. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

- Pujar, who completed her post-graduation in Kannada at the University, joined its Kannada department at the Nandihalli campus earlier this month as a guest lecturer

Devegowda backs KRS Road named after CM

MYSURU, 28 DEC

JD(S) legislator GT Devegowda defended the proposal to name a stretch of KRS Road after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, stating that there was no issue with naming the road if it had not been named after anyone previously.

Speaking to reporters on Saturday, Devegowda addressed the ongoing debate regarding the naming of the road stretch from Lakshminarayana Temple to the Royall Inn Junction Circle on KRS Road. He noted that Mysuru City Corporation (MCC) had invited public objections on the matter, indicating that the issue had sparked discussions in several circles.

Mysuru MP Yaduveer Krishnadutta Chamaraja Wadiyar had also claimed that the road was originally named after Princess Krishnajammanni, the sister of the former ruler of Mysuru, Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar. Wadiyar pointed out that the princess had constructed the PKTB (Princess Kemparajammanni Tuber culosis) Hospital on KRS Road.

GT Devegowda **PHOTO: PTI**

Devegowda suggested that MCC officials should verify all available records related to the road before making a decision. He emphasised that if the road had not been named after anyone, there was no harm in naming it after Siddaramaiah.
—*Salar News*

Wife found dead, husband booked for abetment

BENGALURU, 28 DEC

A 27-year-old woman was found dead at her residence in Kempegowda Nagar, Byadarahalli in the City. A case of cruelty and abetment to suicide has been registered against her husband and nine others.

Speaking to Salar News, the police said that the woman, identified as Ranjitha, was found hanging inside her house on Wednesday night. Her brother filed a complaint against Ranjitha's husband, Kishore, and nine others including two women with whom Kishore was allegedly having an affair.

The complainant claimed that Kishore, who was addicted to alcohol and gambling, had been harassing his wife. His extramarital relationships led to frequent disputes between the couple.
—*Salar News*

Contractor suicide in Bidar: 2 head constables suspended

BIDAR, 28 DEC

Two head constables posted at the Gandhi Gunj police station here were suspended for dereliction of duty in connection with the suicide of a 26-year-old contractor who died by lying in front of a train in Bidar, police said on Saturday.

Rajesh Chelva and Shamala were suspended on Friday for not filing a missing complaint when the victim's family approached the police station, they said.

"Instead of taking a complaint and registering an FIR, the head constables suggested the family to visit Dhannur police station stating that victim belonged to Katti Tugaon village," a senior police officer said. The two head constables have been suspended for dereliction of duty, he said.

PHOTO: X

Sachin Panchal, a native of Tungadakatti in Bhalki Taluk of Bidar, who died by suicide on Thursday had taken a contract in the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department.

In a suicide note, he alleged that former councillor Raju Kapanur and seven others were responsible for his death. Kapanur is reportedly a close aide of Karnataka Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge.

Reacting to the incident, Kharge had said that he learned about it through the media and that he would be personally demanding an inquiry so that the truth comes out.
—*PTI*

- In a suicide note, he alleged that former councillor Raju Kapanur and seven others were responsible for his death. Kapanur is reportedly a close aide of Karnataka Rural Development Minister Priyank Kharge

SWR Bengaluru division rolls out QR-based ticketing system

BENGALURU, 28 DEC

In a significant move to combat the growing menace of fake unreserved railway ticket rackets, the South Western Railway (SWR), Bengaluru Division, has introduced a QR code-based ticketing system at key railway stations in the City.

The new system, launched on a pilot basis at the Krantivira Sangolli Rayanna (KSR) Railway Station, employs thermal printers for rapid ticket generation.

Speaking about the initiative, Trinetra, Divisional Commercial Manager, SWR Bengaluru Division, explained, "We have set up two counters with thermal printers at the main entrance of the KSR Railway Station. These printers can issue tickets in just two seconds, significantly reducing waiting times and streamlining the ticketing process."

Worried of long ticket queue ? Go digital
Scan QR Code with UTS On Mobile app to buy Unreserved or Platform ticket
MYSURU JN

PHOTO: PTI

This advanced system is not limited to KSR station. "Similar setups have been introduced at other major stations, including Majestic, Yeshwantpur, and KR Puram," Trinetra added. The innovative technology not only speeds up the ticketing process but also ensures tamper-proof ticket issuance, addressing a longstanding challenge for the railway division.

Thermal printing technology has proven to be a game-changer. Unlike traditional printers, which take approximately 20 seconds to print a ticket, thermal printers can produce one in just two to three seconds. The SWR hopes that this time-efficient system will improve customer convenience and deter counterfeiters.

The QR code-based ticketing initiative is expected to be a key step in ensuring a seamless and secure travel experience for railway passengers in Bengaluru. —*Salar News*

LR IV Fluid cause of maternal deaths in Raichur & Ballari

RAICHUR, 28 DEC

Test reports from laboratories in Bengaluru and Hyderabad have confirmed that the use of Lactated Ringer (LR) IV fluid, which was unfit for use, contributed to the maternal deaths at government hospitals in Sindanur and Ballari.

Raichur Deputy Commissioner Nitesh K revealed that the LR fluid supplied to Sindanur Taluk Government Hospital, where four maternal deaths were reported in October and November, had come from Ballari District Hospital. Several similar deaths were also reported at Ballari Government Hospital due to the same fluid, which was supplied by a company from West Bengal. —*Salar News*

BBMP's animal norms evoke mixed reactions

BENGALURU, 28 DEC

BBMP's directive to public and private institutions, including Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and Apartment Owners' Associations, to implement Animal Welfare Board of India guidelines on community animals by 15 January, 2025, has evoked mixed reactions among the citizens.

While some residents and associations welcomed the move, others expressed concerns about its implementation. "BBMP's guidelines are well thought out, but enforcement has always been challenging.

They need to engage more NGOs and animal care workers to ensure the rules are effectively implemented," said Sujaya Jagadish, member of Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Bengaluru Urban). Rakhee Anil, a resident of Koramangala, highlighted issues faced by those who don't have any pets. "Many pet owners don't follow rules, such as cleaning up after their pets."

On the other hand, Shalini Rao, a pet parent from Whitefield, welcomed the guidelines. "But, I hope they also address conflicts caused by people who don't understand pets."

BBMP Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath said they would conduct surprise checks to ensure compliance with guidelines. "We are witnessing increasing cases of harassment of pet owners and community animal feeders, and relocation. —*Salar News*

PUBLIC SAFETY

City cops issue traffic advisory ahead of New Year's eve

BENGALURU, 28 DEC

To ensure smooth traffic flow and maintain law and order during New Year's Eve celebrations, Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP) have announced several restrictions in key areas of the City. These measures aim to manage the massive crowds expected in popular hotspots such as MG Road, Brigade Road, Church Street, Koramangala, and Indiranagar.

MG Road, Brigade Road and Church Street (from 8pm on 31 Dec to 2am on 1 Jan):

Vehicles will be prohibited on MG Road (from Anil Kumble Circle to Residency Road Junction near Mayo Hall), Brigade Road (from Cauvery Emporium Junction to Opera Junction), Church Street (from Brigade Road Junction to Museum Road Junction), Museum Road (from MG Road Junction to Old Madras Bank Road), Rest House Road (from Museum Road Junction to Brigade Road Junction), Residency Cross Road to Residency Road Junction near Shankar Nag Theatre,

Parking will be prohibited on: MG Road (from Anil Kumble Circle to Trinity Circle), Brigade Road (from Arts & Crafts Junction to Opera Junction), Church Street (from Brigade Road Junction to St Marks Road Junction), Rest House Road (from Brigade Road Junction to Museum Road Junction), Museum Road, (from MG Road Junction to Old Madras Bank Road). Parking areas have been arranged at Shivajinagar BMTC Shopping Complex (1st floor), UB City, Garuda Mall and Cubbon Park. Vehicle parking will be restricted on the 80 Feet Road, (from UCO Bank Junction to NGV Back Gate Junction on both sides) and Someshwara Temple Road (from Cemetery Cross to Microland Junction).

Parking facilities have been arranged at the 60 Feet Model Road (left side) from Munireddy Kalyana Mantap to Canara Bank Junction, and BBMP Grounds (Opposite Munireddy Kalyana Mantap and next to Bethany School).

Parking is restricted at Indiranagar 100 Feet Road (from Old Madras Road Junction to Domlur Flyover Junction on both sides) and 12th Main Road (from 80 Feet Road to Indiranagar Double Road Junction on both sides).
—*Salar News*

These measures aim to manage the massive crowds expected in popular hotspots such as MG Road, Brigade Road, Church Street, Koramangala, and Indiranagar **PHOTO: ANI**

Police detain SFI activists in BPSC protest row

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Delhi Police on Saturday detained members of Students' Federation of India (SFI) who were protesting outside Bihar Bhawan against the lathicharge on BPSC aspirants in Patna The protesters were raising slogans and carrying posters. Protesting students in Patna are demanding cancellation of Integrated Combined (Preliminary) Competitive Examination (CCE) 2024 conducted by Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) on 13 December. The protestors are demanding a re-examination of the Bihar Public Service Commission exam. Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Patna Sadar, Gaurav Kumar, said earlier that a board comprising five representatives would submit a memorandum to the BPSC secretary on behalf of the protesters. *—ANI*

Periya murder: Ex-CPI(M) MLA, 13 other convicted

KOCHI, 28 DEC

A CBI court on Saturday found 14 accused including a CPI(M) former MLA guilty in the murder of two Youth Congress workers - Kripesh and Sarath Lal at Periya in Kasaragod district of Kerala five years ago. Of the 24 accused, the court found the first eight accused guilty of murder and conspiracy charges and another six guilty of conspiracy, destruction of evidence and providing assistance for operating the crime, while remaining 10 accused have been acquitted in the case. The court will pronounce the sentence on 3 January. The case pertains to the murder of Youth Congress workers Kripesh, 19, and Sarath Lal P K, 24, allegedly by CPI(M) workers on 17 February, 2019. *—PTI*

'Leaders attacking Andhra govt officials won't be spared'

KADAPA 28 DEC

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan on Saturday warned that any political leader who "attacks" or "obstructs" a government official on duty will face stern action. He issued this warning after visiting a Dalit government official who was allegedly attacked by a local YSRCP leader C Sudarshan Reddy. "If you (political leaders) attack officials with arrogance, we will ensure you receive fitting punishment," Kalyan told reporters outside Kadapa RIMS Hospital. According to Kalyan, Sudarshan Reddy, along with several others, allegedly attacked and abused Gaaliveedu Mandal Parishad Development Officer (MPDO) Jawahar Babu in Annamayya district, for refusing to hand over the keys to an official room. Besides locking Babu in a room and thrashing him, casteist slurs were hurled at him, along with 'death threats', Kalyan said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Gadkari reviews highway projects in Andamans

PORT BLAIR, 28 DEC

Union minister Nitin Gadkari is on a tour to Andaman and Nicobar Islands to review various national highway projects in the archipelago, a senior official said on Saturday. The Union Minister for Road, Transport and Highways arrived in Port Blair on Friday and held a meeting with Lieutenant Governor Admiral (Retd) DK Joshi and later reviewed national highway projects, he said. On Saturday, he interacted with BJP workers and discussed various issues related to the development of the archipelago. "We requested his intervention for the completion of various pending work, including those related to land conversion, medical facilities, higher education, and roads," a senior BJP worker said. *—PTI*

ED summons KTR in money laundering case

KTR denies ₹55 cr corruption claim; to appear before ED on 7 Jan

HYDERABAD, 28 DEC

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has summoned Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president and former minister KT Rama Rao, along with several others, for questioning in connection with a money laundering investigation linked to alleged financial irregularities during a Formula-E race held in Hyderabad in February 2023. Official sources confirmed that the agency took this step following the registration of an enforcement case information report (ECIR) last week under various sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), prompted by a complaint from the Telangana Police Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB).

Rama Rao, the working president of the BRS and son of former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao, is scheduled to appear for questioning on 7 January. Senior IAS officer Arvind Kumar and retired bureaucrat BLN Reddy, who formerly served as chief engineer of the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA), have been summoned for 2 and 3 January respectively.

Rama Rao, working president of the BRS played a key role in facilitating the 2023 Formula-E race in Hyderabad **PHOTO: PTI**

The investigation focuses on alleged payments amounting to approximately Rs 55 crore, some of which were reportedly made in foreign currency without the necessary approvals, in relation to the organisation of the Formula-E race. The ED is also examining potential violations of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) in this context.

Rama Rao has firmly denied any wrongdoing, asserting, "Where is the corruption in this? We have paid Rs 55 crore. They (Formula-E) acknowledged the payment." He further explained that the funds were transferred from the HMDA's account at Indian Overseas Bank, characterising the transaction as "straightforward."

In response to the allegations, Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has accused Rama Rao of misconduct, claiming that the state government saved approximately Rs 500 crore by choosing not to release additional funds to the Formula-E organisers under his administration.

Rama Rao, who served as the municipal administration minister during the previous BRS regime, played a key role in facilitating the race in Hyderabad. Originally scheduled to take place again in February, the event was cancelled following the Congress party's assumption of power in December 2023. Recently, Telangana Governor Jishnu Dev Varma granted permission for the ACB to initiate proceedings against Rama Rao, potentially escalating the legal ramifications of the case. *—PTI*

Manipur CM deploys extra forces amid ongoing violence

IMPHAL, 28 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

Manipur's Chief Minister N Biren Singh has vehemently condemned the indiscriminate firing by militants in the Thamnapokpi and Sanasabi areas of Imphal East district, which left four individuals injured. In a post on social media platform X, Singh described the attack by Kuki militants as "a cowardly and unprovoked assault on innocent lives" that threatens peace and harmony in the region.

The Chief Minister confirmed that additional security forces have been deployed to the affected areas and urged the public to remain calm and united in the face of ongoing challenges. "Adequate security personnel have been rushed, and the injured are receiving necessary medical assistance. Central forces and the state police must coordinate effectively when responding to such situations," he added. Among the injured is L Kabichandra, a video journalist for a private television channel, who sustained a bullet wound to his left thigh during the attack on Saturday morning. He was reportedly hit by what is believed to be sniper fire while covering the violent incidents in Thamnapokpi village since the previous day.

The escalation of violence began late Friday, with firing from militants in the surrounding hills targeting Thamnapokpi and Sanasabi. An elderly woman was injured during these hostilities and has since been treated at Yaingangpokpi Primary Health Centre and is now out of danger. Meanwhile, a massive search was started for the armed men, police said.

Combined teams of police, Army, CRPF and BSF were conducting the search in Yaingangpokpi and the surrounding hill areas, they said. *—PTI*

Clash erupts between PMK's Ramadoss, son at party meet

PUDUCHERRY, 28 DEC

Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) President Anbumani on Saturday opposed a decision of his father, party founder S Ramadoss, in a party meeting here on Saturday, and the octogenarian leader curtly said those who do not wish to follow his diktats should quit the outfit.

When the party patriarch Ramadoss announced that a party member, Mukunthan, is appointed president of the state youth wing, Anbumani voiced his opposition and a war of words broke out between the father and son at the party's special general council meeting.

A former union minister and Rajya Sabha MP, Anbumani, said Mukunthan was only about 4 months old in the party and expressed his opposition to his appointment.

"Whoever it may be, what I say must be followed, understand?," Ramadoss asserted and said that the party was founded by him and no one could be in the party if his directions were not complied with. A stunned Anbumani dropped the handheld microphone on the table, seen as an act of disappointment and disapproval, placed in front of the speakers, who were seated on the dais. Ramadoss, seemingly upset, made it clear that whoever it may be, if they do not fall in line and comply with his instructions, must quit. He was categorical and firm on his stand of appointing Mukunthan to the post.

When PMK aligned with BJP for the Lok Sabha polls, it was speculated that Anbumani supported it, while Ramadoss favoured AIADMK **PHOTO: PTI**

When PMK aligned with the BJP for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, it was speculated that only Anbumani favoured the alliance and that his father Ramadoss was inclined to join hands with the AIADMK. *—PTI*

DELHI ASSEMBLY POLLS

Delhi LG Saxena to probe allegations of AAP snooping

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena has ordered inquiries into Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit's allegations of snooping and large sums of cash being brought into the city from Punjab ahead of the next year's Assembly election.

In a letter dated 25 December, Dikshit flagged the alleged presence of intelligence personnel from the "Punjab Government" outside his residence in Delhi.

He alleged that "official vehicles" associated with these personnel had often been seen outside his home, suggesting surveillance and intimidation.

There was no immediate response available from the Aam Aadmi Party, which governs both Delhi and Punjab.

Saxena has sought a report on the allegations within three days. In addition, Dikshit also accused the Punjab government of sending "large sums of cash" (in crores) to Delhi to influence voters ahead of the election.

VK Saxena **PHOTO: PTI**

He said "private vehicles," often escorted by Punjab Police, were coming through Haryana and Rajasthan to Delhi. The LG office has ordered the Delhi police commissioner to take "immediate steps" to check vehicles at the city's borders, particularly those coming from Punjab.

The DGPs of Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan have been advised to be on high alert and monitor any unusual movements that may indicate illegal transfers of cash or election-related malpractice. *—PTI*

BJP trying to stop AAP's welfare schemes: Kejri

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal accused BJP of blocking welfare schemes for women and the elderly.

Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal, a former Delhi Chief Minister, said BJP is nervous over 'Mahila Samman Yojana' scheme and the proposed 'Sanjeeveni' scheme as lakhs of people have registered already.

While 'Mahila Samman Yojana' entails paying Rs 2100 to women above 18 years of age, the proposed Sanjeevni Yojana provides for free health treatment to senior citizens. "I had said that after winning the election, we will give Rs 2,100 to women and free treatment to the elderly above 60 years of age. This made BJP nervous. First, they sent their goons, then sent the police and uprooted the registration camp, today they have ordered a fake investigation that there will be an investigation. What will be investigated?" he asked. *—ANI*

CLOSE AIDES HOLDING NITISH CAPTIVE, CALLING SHOTS: TEJASHWI

PATNA, 28 DEC

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Saturday claimed that Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was no longer able to function normally and has become "captive" to a handful of close aides.

Yadav, who had served as Kumar's deputy until the JD(U) supremo's abrupt return to the BJP-led NDA, made the remark in response to queries from journalists here about speculations of yet another volte face by the septuagenarian leader.

"Kumar has been held captive by four leaders of his party, two in Delhi and the rest here, who are calling the shots," claimed Yadav.

The RJD leader, whose party is a part of INDIA bloc, cited the example of the reply to a letter recently written by former Delhi Chief Minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, who had urged Kumar to "rethink" the support to the BJP, in the backdrop of Babasaheb Ambedkar's alleged denigration by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. *—PTI*

Protests erupt in Beed over sarpanch's murder

BEED, 28 DEC

A large protest took place in Beed city, Maharashtra, as thousands gathered to demand justice for Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, who was brutally murdered earlier this month.

The demonstration saw attendance from various political figures, including ruling party MLAs, who called for the dismissal of Dhananjay Munde, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) minister.

Prominent participants included Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange and members of the Kolhapur royal family. Local BJP MLAs Suresh Dhas and Abhimanyu Pawar voiced their concerns, emphasising that the pain from Deshmukh's murder resonates throughout Maharashtra. "If the accused are not arrested, protests will spread," Pawar warned.

Demonstration saw attendance from various political figures, including ruling party MLAs, who called for dismissal of Dhananjay Munde **PHOTO: ANI**

Santosh Deshmukh was abducted and killed on 9 December, allegedly while defending a member of the Dalit community from an extortion attempt linked to a local windmill company. Four suspects have been arrested, but Walmik Karad, accused of being the mastermind, remains at large.

Vaibhavi Deshmukh, the victim's daughter, demanded justice during the protest, recounting her father's sacrifice. *—PTI*

A FINAL GOODBYE

Singh's words live on as Odisha tribals bid tearful adieu

KORAPUT, 28 DEC

As the nation bid adieu to former prime minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on Saturday, two tribals in a remote Odisha district, who were honoured by him in 2012 for biodiversity conservation, recalled with tears cherished memories with the beloved leader.

Raila Muduli, a resident of Boliguda village and Chandra Pradhani of Nuaguda, said words were not enough to express their grief over the demise of Singh.

The former PM passed away on Thursday night at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences due to age-related medical complications. He was 92.

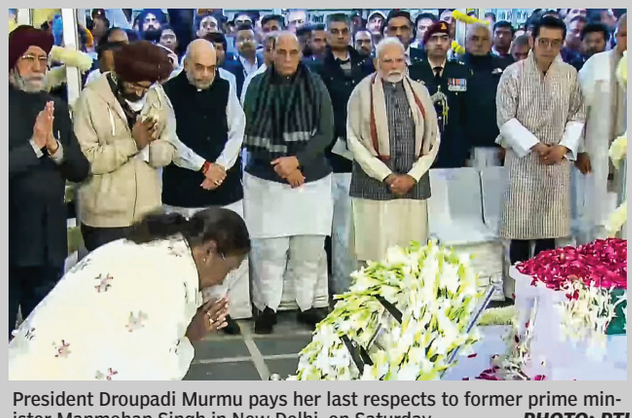
Muduli and Pradhani had received Certificates of Recognition for their contribution to biodiversity conservation from Singh during the 99th Indian Science Congress held at Bhubaneswar 12 years ago.

"I was at a loss for words when I heard about his demise on Friday," said Raila, a farmer from the Bhumia tribe.

"I remember feeling very nervous that day (in 2012), but receiving the award from the former prime minister was an unforgettable moment. He was gentle and soft-spoken, and encouraged us to work dedicatedly for biodiversity conservation," he said. "Sir smiled at me as I received the award and motivated us to continue our efforts in preserving biodiversity", he said.

"I wish I had more opportunities to meet him," Pradhani said. Prasant Parida, director of the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation in Jeypore, said Koraput was recognised as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in 2012.

"Raila and Chandra were instrumental in representing Koraput at the event where the former prime minister acknowledged their community's efforts," said Parida. A seven-day national mourning is being observed as a mark of respect to the former prime minister during which the national flag will be flown at half-mast across the nation, the Union Home Ministry has announced. *—PTI*



President Droupadi Murmu pays her last respects to former prime minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi, on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

"We are remembering his contributions. We stand with the Indian people to show our respect for the leader.

-Abed Jazer, Palestineian diplomat

"I am saddened to learn of the passing of Manmohan Singh. He played a pivotal role in in shaping India's economic trajectory.

-UN Chief Antonio Guterres

"The unprecedented US-India cooperation today is a result of Manmohan Singh's strategic vision. He was a kind and humble person.

-Joe Biden, US President

"I am saddened by the passing of Singh, who reshaped US-India relations with the US-India Civilian Nuclear Agreement.

-Condoleezza Rice, Former US secretary of state

"Singh was a leader who reshaped and liberalised India's economy through his vision, laying the foundation for India's remarkable growth

-Lawrence Wong, Singapore PM

PHOTO: X

Death toll in Jaipur LPG tanker crash touches 20

JAIPUR, 28 DEC

The death toll in the LPG tanker accident on the Jaipur-Ajmer highway rose to 20 with one more man succumbing to severe burn injuries at the SMS Hospital here on Saturday. Confirming the death, SMS hospital superintendent Dr Sushil Bhati said, "Seven persons are undergoing treatment at the hospital at present." An LPG tanker collided with a truck on 20 December, sparking a massive fireball that turned a stretch of the Jaipur-Ajmer highway into an inferno, engulfing more than 35 vehicles. Eleven persons died on the day of the incident. *—PTI*

Grandfather, father & uncle held for girl's rape in UP

AURAIYA, 28 DEC

A girl's grandfather, father and uncle have been arrested here for allegedly raping the minor over a period of several months, leading to her pregnancy, police said on Saturday. Additional Superintendent of Police said the girl, accompanied by a woman relative, had approached the local Bidhuna police station with the complaint on Friday following which an FIR was lodged and investigation was launched. She said being sexually exploited by her grandfather, father, and uncle for several months. After a medical examination, it was discovered she is two months pregnant. The accused were arrested and remanded in judicial custody by a local court. Charges have also been invoked under the stringent Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, Mishra said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Six workers injured in namkeen factory blast in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Six workers were injured in a blast triggered by a fire at a namkeen factory in southwest Delhi's Najafgarh area on Saturday, officials said. A fire broke out at a two-storey manufacturing unit run by Manu Namkeen Factory, causing 17 water tenders to be pressed into service. Six workers inside were injured in a blast triggered by the fire, who were taken to Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital. The fire was brought under control at 11.30am, and the injured were identified as Shivam, 23, Amit, 35,Amit Singh, 26, Chandan, 22, Jaipal, 40, and Vasudev, 50,. The workers were baking biscuits in an over on the ground floor at the time. An investigation is on going. *—PTI*

Man strangled to death during clash between families

MUMBAI, 28 DEC

A 50-year-old brother of a civic contractor was allegedly strangled to death during a clash between two families in Mumbai's Kurla area, following which five persons have been arrested, police said on Saturday. Ishaq Abbas Beig, a contractor in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's Solid Waste Management Department, was killed in a dispute with local citisen Rubina over poor working conditions. The incident occurred at the Hussaini Compound in Kurla west, where Beig and his family frequently engaged in altercations. Beig lodged a complaint with the police, leading to a murder case registered under the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS). Five people, including two women, were arrested, and an investigation is ongoing. *—PTI*

SC to Punjab: Shift farmer leader to hospital by 31 Dec

Court doubts intention to deny medical aid to Dallewal

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Supreme Court has granted the Punjab government until 31 December to persuade farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal to receive medical treatment, amid growing concerns over his prolonged hunger strike lasting over a month.

The apex court came down heavily on the Punjab government for not shifting Dallewal, who has been fasting for over a month, to a hospital even as it doubted the intention of the agitating farmers for resisting availability of medical aid to their septuagenarian leader. In an unusual session on Saturday, a vacation bench comprising Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan reprimanded the Punjab government for its failure to act decisively and for not adhering to previous orders to provide medical assistance to Dallewal. The court expressed frustration at the government's inaction, noting that the situation had deteriorated significantly.

There is growing concerns over farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal's prolonged hunger strike lasting over a month PHOTO: PTI

The Punjab Advocate General, Gurminder Singh, acknowledged challenges faced by the government, stating that a team of medical professionals had attempted to convince Dallewal to leave the protest site for hospital care but were met with significant resistance from fellow protesters. Dallewal, steadfast in his demand for a legal guarantee of minimum support prices for crops, has reportedly declined all medical aid, including IV drips, insisting that accepting help would undermine the cause he is advocating for.

This refusal escalated tensions, prompting the Supreme Court to frame the farmer leaders obstructing Dallewal's hospitalisation as potentially culpable of abetment to suicide.

Supreme Court has permitted the Punjab government to seek logistical support from the Centre if deemed necessary, urging immediate compliance with its directive to transfer Dallewal to a medical facility. The court's previous rulings also hinted that Dallewal could be treated at a makeshift hospital located within 700m of the protest site.

The case has drawn attention due to its parallels with civil rights activist Irom Sharmila, who undertook a long-term hunger strike under medical supervision. The Supreme Court had previously directed Punjab officials to conduct medical assessments on Dallewal.

Farmers affiliated with the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have been stationed at Shambhu and Khanauri border points since February, following a cessation of their march to Delhi due to intervention by security forces. *—PTI*

Flights, trains disrupted due to heavy snowfall in Kashmir

People walk past stranded vehicles on Jammu-Srinagar National Highway, in Anantnag on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

SRINAGAR, 28 DEC

Normal life was thrown out of gear in Kashmir on Saturday as most areas of the valley received snowfall, disrupting flight and railway operations and also leading to the closure of the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway, officials said.

Moderate to heavy snowfall was recorded across Kashmir since Friday, including the season's first snowfall in Srinagar city and other plain areas of the valley.

In south Kashmir, heavy to very heavy snowfall was recorded in the plains, while central Kashmir's plains received moderate snowfall.

The plains of north Kashmir received light to moderate snowfall, the officials said.

Srinagar recorded about eight inches of snow, while neighbouring Ganderbal recorded about seven inches. Sonamarg, a famous tourist destination, recorded around eight inches of snow, the officials added.

The Zojila axis along the Srinagar-Leh highway received about 15 inches of snow, they said. Areas in Budgam district received 7-10 inches of snow, while the plains in Anantnag district recorded around 17 inches.

The upper areas of the south Kashmir district received over two feet of snow, the officials said.

The tourist town of Pahalgam recorded 18 inches of fresh snowfall.

Areas in Pulwama district recorded 10-15 inches of snow, while neighbouring Kulgam received 18-25 inches and Shopian recorded around 18 inches of snowfall, the officials added. In Bandipora district of north Kashmir, the plains recorded four inches of snow, while the higher reaches, including Gurez, received 6 to 10 inches of snowfall. *—PTI*

2 held for grenade attack on police station in Amritsar

CHANDIGARH, 28 DEC

Punjab Police has arrested two persons for allegedly carrying out a grenade attack on the Islamabad police station in Amritsar recently, officials said on Saturday.

The attack was carried out in the early hours of 17 December, though no one was injured in the incident.

Punjab Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav on Saturday said the special operation cell in Amritsar busted a narco-terror module being operated by controllers from abroad.

"Gurjeet Singh from Dande in Amritsar and Baljit Singh from Chhapa in Tarn Taran have been arrested. The arrested persons carried out a grenade attack on Islamabad Police Station on December 17, 2024," the DGP said in a post on X.

So far, 1.4 kg of heroin, one hand grenade and two pistols have been recovered, he said.

After an explosion-like noise was heard at the Islamabad police station on 17 December, Punjab Police had dubbed it as an "attack". *—PTI*

50 ARRESTED OVER VIOLENCE IN UTTAR PRADESH'S SAMBHAL

SAMBHAL, 28 DEC

Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) in Sambhal, Shrish Chandra on Saturday said that a total of 50 people have been arrested in connection with the violence near the Jama Masjid area in Sambhal district on 24 November. Sambhal witnessed violence over a court-ordered survey of a Mughal-era mosque in the district, leaving four people dead.

The ASP said one individual who was wanted in the case had been arrested from Delhi's Batla House. "The person and his companions were involved in the incident," he said.

Earlier on Saturday, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen Chief Asaduddin Owaisi took a dig at the construction of a police outpost near Jama Masjid, saying that government has money for nothing else but for liquor bars and police posts.

Meanwhile, Officials of the Chandausi municipality said that nearby encroachments will be cleared in order to trace out an ancient stepwell. Saturday marked the eighth day of the excavation, the executive officer of the Chandausi municipality, told reporters. *—PTI*

Thrissur: Denial of nod for fireworks stirs row

THRISSUR, 28 DEC

The district administration's denial of permission for the fireworks display during 'Vela Ezunnallippu', a traditional ritual, at the famed Paramekkavu and Thiruvambady temples here has sparked a row with the shrine managements viewing it as a "test dose" to destroy the iconic Thrissur Pooram.

The Additional District Magistrate (ADM) on Friday issued an order denying permission for the fireworks display in connection with the annual ritual citing the new amendment to the union government's Explosive Rules and based on reports of various state government departments in accordance with that.

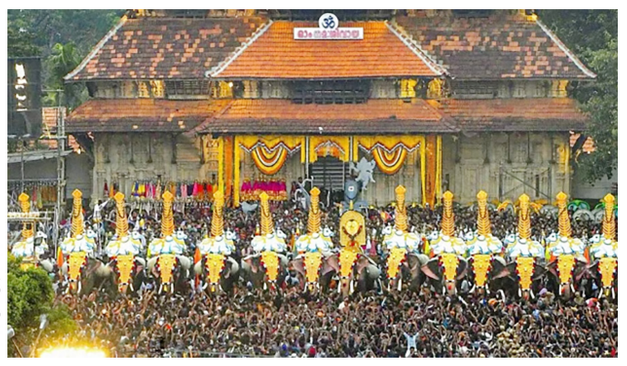


PHOTO: PTI

The Vela Ezunnallippu ritual and the related fireworks display of the two temples are scheduled in January first week.

In the order, the district administration stated that there is no physical circumstance to carry out the fireworks display in the area and it may pose a threat to the life and property of the public.

The opinion of concerned investigating officers that the fireworks should not be allowed taking into account the safety of public life has also been considered, said the order. The order was issued on the request for permission to conduct fireworks display submitted by Thiruvambady Devaswom.

Meanwhile, the order denying permission to the fireworks display citing the central explosive rule guidelines drew sharp reactions from the temple managements.

K Girish Kumar, Secretary, Thiruvambady Devaswom, vehemently criticised the move. *—PTI*

BOREWELL HORROR

Trapped girl's mom criticises delay in rescue

JAIPUR, 28 DEC

Dholi Devi has been anxiously praying for over 110 hours as rescuers continue their desperate efforts to save her three-year-old daughter, Chetna, who has been trapped in a 150-foot deep borewell since 23 December. The little girl fell into the borewell while playing on her father's farm in Rajasthan's Kotputli-Behror district.

As the hours pass, hope for Chetna's survival wanes. A heart-wrenching video surfaced on Saturday showing the distraught Dholi Devi pleading for help, her hands clasped together in desperation. "It's been six days... My daughter is hungry and thirsty. If it were the collector's child, would she have allowed this to happen?" she implored.

Initial rescue attempts using an iron ring attached to a rope proved fruitless. After two days of unsuccessful efforts, a piling machine was dispatched to the site on Wednesday, and a parallel pit was excavated. However, heavy rain hampered operations on Friday. On Saturday, a two-member team entered the pit to dig an L-shaped tunnel towards Chetna.

Three-year-old Chetna has been trapped in a 150-foot deep borewell in Rajasthan since 23 December PHOTO: PTI

District Collector Kalpana Agarwal reported, "Two NDRF jawans are manually drilling, and we are monitoring them via camera. Equipment they require is being sent down." Local police officer Sarund Mohammad Imran confirmed that all possible efforts are being made, despite the setbacks caused by the weather.

As time passes, concerns grow over the toddler's ability to survive without food and water, while a team of doctors stands by with an ambulance at the scene. This incident follows a similar tragedy two weeks prior, when a five-year-old boy in neighbouring Dausa district lost his life after being trapped in a borewell for over 55 hours. *—PTI*

CHENNAI RAPE

There were wide-spread protests over the sexual assault of a woman student in the Anna University campus PHOTO: PTI

HC directs SIT probe, Rs 25L aid to victim

CHENNAI, 28 DEC

The Madras High Court on Saturday directed constitution of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the alleged sexual assault of a woman student in the Anna University campus here recently.

All three members of the SIT will be women IPS officers. The court also directed the state government to pay the victim a compensation of Rs 25 lakh.

A bench of Justice SM Subramaniam and Justice V Lakshminarayan gave the order while hearing a plea for transferring the probe into the matter to CBI.

The bench further said the victim's studies should not be affected. Anna University should not charge any fees from her.

The National Commission for Women also constituted a two-member fact-finding committee to investigate the alleged sexual assault.

The commission's chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar has set up the panel comprising member, NCW, Mamta Kumari, and retired IPS officer and former DGP of Maharashtra, Praveen Dixit, to "investigate and recommend action," a statement said.

The fact-finding committee is likely to visit Chennai on 30 December.

"The committee will investigate the case, examine the circumstances leading to the incident, and assess the actions taken by the authorities. It will also interact with concerned officials, the victim, her family, friends, and various NGOs to ascertain the facts and propose measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents," the NCW said.

They already taken suo moto cognizance of the incident, the victim being a 19-year-old girl.

The woman was sexually assaulted in the campus of the premier technical varsity recently, prompting widespread outrage from opposition parties and the civil society. One person has been arrested so far in connection with the incident. *—PTI*

1 worker dies after being hit by actor Urmila's car

MUMBAI, 28 DEC

One worker was killed and another seriously injured after they were hit by Marathi actor Urmila Kothare's car in Kandivali area of Mumbai in the wee hours of Saturday, police said.

The actor and her driver were also injured in the accident, an official said.

The incident took place when Kothare was returning home after finishing her shoot, he said.

"Kothare's car hit two labourers who were engaged in Metro rail work under the Poisar Metro station in Kandivali east shortly after midnight. While labourer died, another was seriously injured. The actor and her driver were also injured in the accident. But they were saved as the airbags opened at the right time," the official of the Samta Nagar police station said.

As per the preliminary information, the driver lost control over the speeding vehicle, due to which it hit the victims working on roadside, he said. *—PTI*

Protest over J&K ropeway project enters fourth day

REASI (JAMMU), 28 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

A shutdown in protest of a proposed ropeway project in the Trikuta Hills of Reasi district has entered its fourth day, as demonstrators continue a hunger strike demanding the release of detained activists in Katra. The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti declared a complete shutdown of commercial activities earlier this week, which was supported by the Jammu Chamber of Commerce and Industries (JCCI).

On Friday, the Sangharsh Samiti extended the strike by an additional 72 hours. Since Wednesday, all shops, restaurants, and businesses have remained closed, significantly disrupting daily life in a region that regularly welcomes thousands of pilgrims to the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine.

Five protesters are on hunger strike, advocating for the release of 18 members of the Samiti detained during a protest against the ropeway project. Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary described the construction decision as "wrong" and urged the Lieutenant Governor to engage in dialogue with the protesters.

JCCI President Arun Gupta visited the protestors, emphasising that development projects should not adversely impact the local population. *—PTI*

THEYYAM IN KERALA

Devotees offer chickens and oil lamps as part of Theyyam rituals, at Kanhirangad Sree Vaidyanatha Temple in Kannur district, Kerala on Saturday
PHOTO: PTI

6.2% of patients face long Covid symptoms: WHO

Cardiovascular complications such as strokes, as well as neurological, renal and pulmonary impairments, occur more frequently in individuals following acute Covid-19 infection
PHOTO: PTI

As the world enters its sixth year since the Covid-19 pandemic began, 77 countries reported fresh cases and 27 countries saw people dying of the disease, according to the latest epidemiological update by the World Health Organization (WHO) from 14 October 10-November.

In the first three deadly years of the pandemic, the virus, SARS-CoV-2, evolved rapidly, with a new strain dominating case surges over the months. And it continues to emerge in altered forms, with significant implications for transmissibility, severity and vaccine efficacy, WHO wrote in the new report.

As of December 2024, the United Nations health agency observed, KP.3.1.1 is the most prevalent JN.1 descendent, followed by XEC, a newly designated variant under monitoring. But even as the virus remains so widely in circulation, post-COVID-19 condition (PCC), also known as 'long Covid', remains a major conern with a much larger health burden, WHO highlighted.

WHO noted that around 6.2 per cent of people who had symptomatic Covid-19 develop PCC, citing estimates from 2022. They experience breath, fatigue, and cognitive impairments such as difficulty concentrating—often referred to as "brain fog".

The symptoms may persist for weeks or months after the Covid-19 infection and affect women disproportionately. "Women are 56 per cent more likely to experience PCC than men, according to a meta-analysis," the health agency stated. In 2023, some 409 million people across the world were living long Covid, according to an August report published in Nature Medicine.

PCC can significantly impact daily functioning, making it not only a medical issue but also a social and economic challenge. "Symptoms often occur after mild infections, and are more common among those who were hospitalized or unvaccinated," WHO wrote in the update. While the symptoms may seem like only a handful, the clinical profile of PCC is diverse. It is not just "lingering symptoms" of the infection; it is also associated with an increased risk of severe medical events involving multiple organ systems, the UN health organisation noted. Research suggests potential underlying mechanisms such as immune dysregulation, autoimmunity and microvascular blood clotting.

Cardiovascular complications such as strokes, as well as neurological, renal and pulmonary impairments, occur more frequently in individuals following acute Covid-19 infection, WHO observed. The risks compound with reinfection, emphasising the importance of preventive measures.

However, the pathophysiology of PCC remains incompletely understood, complicating diagnosis and treatment.

The therapeutic landscape for PCC is also in its infancy, but efforts to address the condition are gaining momentum. Current management emphasises a multidisciplinary approach tailored to individual needs. This often includes rehabilitation services involving primary care practitioners and specialists in pulmonology, cardiology, neurology and mental health, WHO stated.

Recent data indicate a decline in the condition's frequency, the health organisation noted. This trend may reflect a combination of widespread vaccination, evolving variants with potentially different pathogenic profiles and improved management of acute Covid-19 cases. Despite this, high transmission rates mean that the absolute number of PCC cases could remain substantial, posing ongoing challenges for healthcare systems.

As the world continues to adapt to living with Covid-19, addressing PCC is critical to minimising the pandemic's enduring toll, according to WHO. The organisation urged global organisations to foster collaboration among researchers, healthcare providers and policymakers to tackle the condition. *—DowntoEarth*

SALAR ساڈا

Climate change reduces plant nutrition, impacting grazers

More than one-third of all animals on Earth, from beetles to cows to elephants, depend on plant-based diets. Plants are a low-calorie food source, so it can be challenging for animals to consume enough energy to meet their needs. Now climate change is reducing the nutritional value of some foods that plant eaters rely on.

Human activities are increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels and raising global temperatures. As a result, many plants are growing faster across ecosystems worldwide.

Some studies suggest that this "greening of the Earth" could partially offset rising greenhouse gas emissions by storing more carbon in plants. However, there's a trade-off: These fast-tracked plants can contain fewer nutrients per bite.

Plant-eating animals may need more time to find and consume food if their usual meal becomes less nutritious, exposing themselves to greater risks from predators and other stresses in the process. Reduced nutritional values can also make animals less fit, reducing their ability to grow, reproduce and survive.

Research has already shown that climate change is causing nutrient dilution in human food crops. Declines in micronutrients, which play important roles in growth and health, are a particular concern: Long-term records of crop nutritional values have revealed declines in copper, magnesium, iron and zinc.

In particular, human deficiencies in iron, zinc and protein are expected to increase in the coming decades because of rising carbon dioxide levels. These declines are expected to have broad impacts on human health and even survival, with the strongest effects among populations that are highly dependent on rice and wheat, such as in East and Central Asia.

Nutrient dilution affects wild species too. Here are some examples.

Giant pandas are a threatened species with great cultural value. Because they reproduce at low rates and need large, connected swaths of bamboo as habitat, they are classified as a vulnerable species whose survival is threatened by land conversion for farming and development. Pandas also could become a poster animal for the threat of nutrient dilution.

The giant panda is considered an "umbrella species," which means that conserving panda habitat benefits many other animals and plants that also live in bamboo groves. Famously, giant pandas are entirely dependent on bamboo and spend large portions of their days eating it. Now, rising temperatures are reducing bamboo's nutritional value and making it harder for the plant to survive.

Insects are essential members of the web of life that pollinate many flowering plants, serve as a food source for birds and animals, and perform other important ecological services. Many insects are plant feeders that are likely to be affected by reduced plant nutritional value. Experiments have found that when carbon dioxide levels increase, insect populations decline, at least partly due to lower-quality food supplies.

Declines in plant food quality are most likely to affect places where nutrients already are scarce and animals struggle now to meet their nutritional needs. These zones include the ancient soils of Australia, along with tropical areas such as the Amazon and Congo basins. Nutrient dilution is also an issue in the open ocean, where rapidly warming waters are reducing the nutritional content of giant sea kelp.

Certain types of plant-feeding animals are likely to face greater declines because they need higher-quality food. Rodents, rabbits, koalas, horses, rhinoceroses and elephants are all hind-gut fermenters – animals that have simple, single-chambered stomachs and rely on microbes in their intestines to extract nutrients from high-fiber food. These species need more nutrient-dense food than ruminants – grazers like cattle, sheep, goats and bison, with four-chambered stomachs that digest their food in stages. Smaller animals also typically require more nutrient-dense food than larger ones, because they have faster metabolisms and consume more energy per unit of body mass. Smaller animals also have shorter guts, so they can't as easily extract all the nutrients from food.

More research is needed to understand what role nutrient dilution may be playing in declines of individual species, including experiments that artificially increase carbon dioxide levels and studies that monitor long-term changes in plant chemistry alongside animals in the field.

Over the longer term, it will be important to understand how nutrient dilution is altering food webs, including shifts in plant species and traits, effects on other animal groups such as predators, and changes in species interactions. *—PTI*

The giant panda is considered an umbrella species, which means that conserving panda habitat benefits many other animals and plants that also live in bamboo groves
PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

What is next in elections: Races to watch out for in 2025

The coming 12 months can't promise the bumper crop of elections we saw during 2024, when countries home to about half the world's population headed to the polls. Still, voters will cast ballots in several important elections throughout the year – and many of the themes persist: the impact of inflation, the rise of the populist right and the fallout of war in Europe and the Middle East.

●Belarus (26 January)

Alexander Lukashenko, Europe's longest-serving authoritarian ruler, will run for his seventh term on 26 January– and he is not expected to lose.

No real opposition will participate in the upcoming elections against Lukashenko, who has run the country since 1994.

Four other people seeking nomination include the head of the Liberal Democratic Party, Aleh Haidukevich, who ran in the 2020 elections, but withdrew his candidacy then in favor of Lukashenko; Hanna Kanapatskaya, a former member of parliament, entrepreneur and candidate in the 2020 Belarusian presidential election; Aliaksandr Khizhnyak, the chairman of the Republican Party of Labor and Justice; and Siarhei Syrankou, first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus. But all have expressed their support for Lukashenko and his key policies.

After the mass protests in 2020's election, the Belarusian authorities stopped setting up polling stations at diplomatic missions. That year, protesters claimed widespread election fraud in favor of Lukashenko and argued that most people actually supported Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, his main opposition rival, who now leads the opposition in exile from Lithuania.

●Germany (23 February)

The German public knew that it would be called upon to vote in a federal election in 2025. But the recent collapse of the German coalition government means that the vote will happen on 23 February– seven months ahead of the anticipated schedule.

Indeed, after weeks of fighting over the budget, Chancellor Olaf Scholz fired Finance Minister Christian Lindner in early November. As a result, Lindner's Free Democratics party left the coalition, meaning that the two remaining parties – Scholz's Social Democrats, or SPD, and the Greens – no longer command a majority in the German parliament. And after losing the confidence vote on 16 December, Scholz got that outcome.. Its economy has been stuck since Covid-19 hit, and the country is facing a second year of recession.

The impact of inflation, the rise of the populist right and the fallout of war in Europe and the Middle East are going to be the major contributing factors in 2025 elections
PHOTO: AI

●Philippines (12 May)

Since the end of the dictatorship of President Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, Philippine presidents have been restricted to single six-year terms but face midterm elections in which Filipinos elect local officials, district representatives to the lower house and 12 nationally elected senators – 2025 is one such year.

On paper, these senatorial races amount to a referendum on the sitting president. And there's no reason to think this dynamic won't prevail in the May 2025 election. Surveys, which have tended to be more accurate in the Philippines than in the U.S. in recent years, show President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s senatorial bets could win as many as nine or 10 of the 12 open positions. This will be important for Marcos Jr., who needs to consolidate his power amid a feud with Vice President Sara Duterte, the daughter of Rodrigo Duterte, the previous occupant of the presidential palace who presided over a ruthless and bloody drugs crackdown. Though she ran as Marcos' ally – vice presidents are elected separately – in 2022, the marriage of convenience quickly fell apart once it became clear that Marcos didn't have Duterte in mind as his successor. A Marcos-dominated senate would increase the likelihood of a conviction should Duterte undergo an impeachment trial for alleged mismanagement of confidential funds.

Not only would a conviction remove her from office, it would also bar her from running for president in 2028.

●Canada (Before 20 October)

It is looking increasingly likely that a federal election in Canada will take place well ahead of the constitutionally mandated deadline of 20 October. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, well down in the polls even before a series of jarring events, now faces the possible – or even likely – fall of his fragile coalition government. Trudeau, recently taunted by US president-elect Donald Trump as the "governor" of Canada and threatened with a 25 per cent tariff, experienced another shock on Dec. 16: Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland resigned over irrevocable differences on key policy issues. Trudeau may become the latest political casualty among global leaders committed to the priorities of the contemporary left rather than the populist right.

He is a long-standing champion of the cultural left and advocate of strong action over the threat of climate change. The result has been massive levels of government spending and soaring deficits. Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre, Trudeau's likely chief rival in the 2025 election, has built a huge lead in the polls that appears based on public anger over high inflation and other material shortcomings. Trudeau is embattled both from within and beyond Canada.

Trump demands that Canada move away from what he has called exploitation of the US in trade and calls on Canada to step up border security in particular and defense spending in general.

Poilievre calls for a shift back toward Canada's abundant fossil fuels to improve the economy – a direct threat to Trudeau's climate change agenda. *—The Conversation*

US may reach debt limit by mid-Jan: Yellen

Extraordinary measures may begin as early as 14 January to prevent a default

WASHINGTON, 28 DEC

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has warned that her department will need to initiate "extraordinary measures" to prevent the nation from reaching its debt ceiling, potentially as soon as January 14. This announcement was made in a letter sent to congressional leaders.

Yellen stated that the Treasury expects to hit the statutory debt ceiling in the period between 14 and 23 January. At that point, extraordinary measures—essentially special accounting manoeuvres—will be employed to keep the government functioning. The debt ceiling, which has been suspended until 1 Janu-ary, 2025, limits how much the federal government is allowed to borrow.

"I respectfully urge Congress to act to protect the full faith and credit of the United States," Yellen wrote to the House and Senate leadership. This comes in the wake of President Joe Biden signing a bill last week that averted a government shutdown but did not include former President Donald Trump's demand to raise or suspend the debt limit. Trump has since expressed dissatisfaction, calling any failure to meet this demand "a betrayal of our country."

- This comes in the wake of President Joe Biden signing a bill last week that averted a government shutdown but did not include former president Donald Trump's demand to raise or suspend the debt limit

Janet Yellen **PHOTO: ANI**

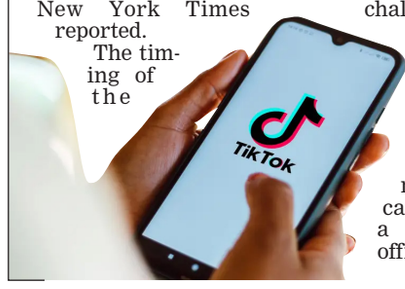
The implications of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, fashioned after lengthy negotiations over government funding, are clear: the nation's borrowing authority of $31.4 trillion remains suspended until January 2025. Notably, Yellen indicated that on 2 January, there would be a projected temporary decrease in debt due to the scheduled redemption of nonmarketable securities linked to Medicare payments, which may delay the need for extraordinary measures at that time.

Currently, the federal debt stands at approximately $36 trillion—a figure that has surged under both Re-publican and Democratic administrations. The sharp increase in inflation following the Covid-19 pandem-ic has led to a rise in government borrowing costs, with debt servicing expected to exceed spending on national security in the coming year. As Republicans prepare to take control of the White House, House, and Senate in the new year, they face substantial debates on funding their ambitions, including extending Trump's 2017 tax cuts. With the stakes high, the urgency for a resolution to the debt ceiling issue looms ever larger. *—PTI*

TRUMP ASKS SC TO HALT TIKTOK BAN

WASHINGTON DC, 28 DEC

US president-elect Donald Trump has filed a brief with the US Supreme Court urging the justices to block a law that mandates the popular social media platform TikTok to either sell its US operations or shut down by 19 January, the New York Times reported.



The timing of the deadline-days before Trump's inauguration--has led to calls for a delay so that the in-coming president can address the issue himself. In his brief, Trump refrains from taking a stance on the constitutional issue regarding the First Amendment, which will be argued by the court next month. First Amendment challenge centres around whether Congress violated free speech rights by effectively banning TikTok. Instead, Trump's brief focuses on his ability to resolve the matter through political means once he assumes office. *—ANI*

Italy wins final approval for its $31B budget

PARIS, 28 DEC

Italy's parliament on Saturday approved the government's 2025 budget, worth about USD 31 billion in tax cuts and social security contributions for low-income citizens. The measures, pushed by the far-right cabinet headed by Premier Giorgia Meloni, won final approval in the Upper House by 108 votes to 63. The country's centre-left opposition said it didn't meet the premier's pledges to slash taxes for most Italians and boost employment. Meloni has staunchly defended the budget, stressing its "wide balance" and its aim to support low and medium-income earners and families with children, while adding resources for the country's struggling health system. The package includes a 1,000-euro bonus for the parents of newborns, with wealthier families excluded, as part of efforts to reverse Italy's declining birth rate. *—PTI*

Taiwan detects 7 Chinese aircrafts near its territory

TAIPEI, 28 DEC

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence (MND) on Saturday reported the operation of seven Chinese military aircraft and five naval vessels around its territory. "7 PLA aircraft and 5 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6am. 1 of the aircraft crossed the median line and entered Tai-wan's northern ADIZ. We have monitored the situation and responded accordingly," the MND said on X. On Thursday, MND reported the operation of five PLAN vessels around Taiwan. Meanwhile, in a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Wednesday, Japanese Foreign Minister Iwaya Takeshi ex-pressed concerns about the situations in the South China Sea and others, and with regards to Taiwan, he stated that Japan is closely monitoring relevant developments, including the recent military activities. *—ANI*

Covid: BioNTech to pay $1.2B over vaccine royalties

NEW YORK, 28 DEC

German company BioNTech has entered into two separate settlement agreements with the US federal agency for medical research and the University of Pennsylvania over the payment of royalties related to its Covid-19 vaccine, the company said in court filings on Friday. The German company, which partners with US pharma giant Pfizer for its Covid-19 vaccine, said it would pay USD791.5 million to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) under the agreement. Separately, the company will pay USD467 million to the University of Pennsylvania in order to dismiss a lawsuit brought against the vaccine maker after the edu-cational institution accused it of underpaying royalties. *—DW News*

PHOTO: X

8 killed in Mexico bus-truck collision

MEXICO CITY, 28 DEC

A collision between a bus and a truck on Mexico's Gulf coast Friday left eight people dead and 27 others injured. Prosecutors in Veracruz State said the accident happened before dawn on a stretch of highway near the state capital, Xalapa. Most of the victims were apparently passengers aboard the ADO-line bus. The dead included three men, four women and a girl. The 27 injured were being treated at local hospi-tals, but there was no immediate information on their condition. The cause of the accident was unclear, but some roads in the mountainous area are known for their pronounced curves. *—PTI*

According to Palestinian medical officials, Israeli strikes in Gaza killed nine people including children **PHOTO: X**

Israel detains director of Gaza hospital: Palestine

DEIR AL-BALAH, 28 DEC

Israel's army detained the director of one of the last functioning hospitals in northern Gaza as overnight strikes in the enclave killed nine people including children, Palestinian medical officials said, while sirens rang out across Israel.

Gaza's Health Ministry said Saturday that Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, was arrested by Israeli forces. The announcement comes a day after Israeli troops stormed the hospital, forc-ing many staff and patients outside to strip in winter weather, according to the ministry.

Israel's army didn't respond to questions about Safiya. On Friday, it denied claims it had entered or set fire to the complex and said it was conducting operations against Hamas infrastructure and mili-tants in the area and had ordered people out of the hospital.

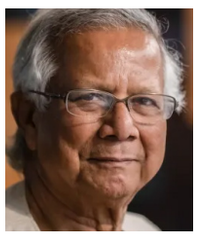
It repeated claims that Hamas militants operate inside Kamal Adwan Hospital but provided no evidence. Hospital officials have denied that. Kamal Adwan Hospital has been hit multiple times over the past three months by Israeli troops waging an offensive against Hamas fighters in surrounding neighbourhoods. The ministry said a strike on the hospital earlier this week killed five medical personnel.

Israel's nearly 15-month-old campaign of bombardment and offensives has devastated Gaza's health sector. The war has killed more than 45,400 Palestinians, more than half women and children, and wounded more than 108,000 others, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Its count does not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Safiya was detained Friday along with dozens of other staff from the hospital and taken to an interrogation centre, the ministry said. *—PTI*

BNP CRITICISES YUNUS' PROPOSAL TO LOWER VOTING AGE TO 17

DHAKA, 28 DEC



Muhammad Yunus **PHOTO: X**

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has expressed concerns regarding Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' recent proposal to reduce the minimum voting age from 18 to 17. Yunus, who assumed his role following the ousting of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August, suggested the change during an election dialogue, advocating for youths to have a say in their future.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir criticised Yunus for raising such a critical issue without prior consultation with stakeholders, noting that the Chief Adviser's remarks could pressure the Election Commission into making binding decisions. *—PTI*

Canadian ministers discuss tariffs with Trump's team

TORONTO, 28 DEC

Two Canadian Cabinet ministers left a recent meeting at Mar-a-Lago without assurances from President-elect Donald Trump regarding his threatened tariffs on Canadian products. Finance Minister Dominic LeBlanc and Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly described the discussions as "productive," but a senior Canadian official revealed that the US remains fixated on the trade deficit with Canada.

Trump has suggested imposing 25 per cent tariffs on all Canadian goods unless Canada addresses what he perceives as an influx of migrants and fentanyl into the United States, despite the fact that the flow is significantly lower than from Mexico. During the meeting, which included Trump's nominee for com-merce secretary, Howard Lutnick, and North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, the Canadian ministers highlighted their government's billion-dollar plan to enhance border security.

Canada's ambassador to Washington, Kirsten Hillman, noted that the US had a $75 billion trade deficit with

PHOTO: X

Canada last year. She explained that one-third of Canadian exports to the US are energy-related, which contributes to the deficit during periods of high oil prices.

In response to Trump's recent social media jabs at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the Canadian leader posted a video highlighting the strong ties between Canada and the US.

Trudeau has warned that tariffs would negatively impact American consumers, as nearly USD3.6 billion worth of goods cross the border daily. Further discussions are anticipated in the weeks ahead, with Joly set to engage with US Senator Lindsey Graham at a dinner on Friday. *—PTI*

PAK-AFGHAN TURMOIL

PHOTO: X

Ceasefire agreement in Kurram soon, says KP CM advisor

PESHAWAR, 28 DEC

Muhammad Ali Saif, adviser to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, expressed optimism that a ceasefire agreement will soon be reached between the feuding tribes in Kurram. Speaking to Ary News, Barrister Saif explained that the Jirga, which is addressing the situation, has been delayed by two days due to one party's need for further consultations.

Despite the delays, Saif is hopeful the warring tribes will finalise a ceasefire within one or two days. He assured that once signed, the agreement would be closely monitored, with strict measures in place for any violations.

The provincial government has declared Kurram a disaster-hit area, imposing an emergency due to se-vere shortages of food and medical supplies resulting from road closures following violent sectarian clashes that have claimed over 130 lives. Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur reiterated the government's commitment to resolving conflicts through dialogue and tribal councils while ensuring citizen safety without compromising authority.

Officials disclosed that roads will remain closed until a resolution is reached. Additionally, steps will be taken to block social media accounts that propagate sectarian hate.

The ongoing unrest, rooted in long-standing land disputes, highlights the urgent need for enduring peace.

A comprehensive agreement ap-pears distant, as both parties must agree to surrender heavy weapons and dismantle their tactical posi-tions.

The Apex Committee of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has demanded the warring factions surrender within 15 days. *—ANI*

Kabul targets Pakistan in retaliation for strikes that killed dozens

KABUL, 28 DEC

Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said Saturday that its forces hit several points inside Pakistan in reta-lia-tion for deadly airstrikes last week.

Pakistan last Tuesday launched an operation to destroy a training facility and kill insurgents in Afghani-stan's eastern Paktika province. The strikes killed dozens of people, mostly women and children.

Taliban Defence Ministry said on X, "Several points beyond the hypothetical line, serving as centres and hideouts for malicious elements and their supporters who organised and coordinated attacks in Afghanistan, were targeted in retaliation from the southeastern direction of the country." The ministry did not say if there were any casualties or how the strikes were carried out. Pakistani officials have accused the Taliban of not doing enough to combat cross-border militant activity, a charge the Taliban government denies, saying it does not allow anyone to carry out attacks against any country from its soil. No one from Pakistan's Foreign Ministry was available for comment .Afghanistan has for decades rejected the border, known as the Durand Line, drawn by British colonial authorities in the 19th century through the mountainous and often lawless tribal belt between what is now Afghanistan and Pakistan. *—PTI*

Pakistan launched an operation to destroy a training facility and kill insurgents in Afghani-stan's eastern Paktika province **PHOTO: X**

'SALT TYPHOON'

Chinese espionage hits 9th US telecom firm

WASHINGTON, 28 DEC

A ninth US telecom firm has been confirmed to have been hacked as part of a sprawling Chinese espio-nage campaign that gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations of an un-known number of Americans, a top White House official has said.

Biden administration officials said this month that at least eight telecommunications companies, as well as dozens of nations, had been affected by the Chinese hacking blitz known as Salt Typhoon.

But deputy national security adviser Anne Neuberger told reporters Friday that a ninth victim had been identified after the administration released guidance to compa-

PHOTO: FREEPIK

nies about how to hunt for Chinese cul-prits in their networks. The update from Neuberger is the latest development in a massive hacking operation that has alarmed national security officials, exposed cybersecurity vulnerabilities in the private sector and laid bare Chi-na's hacking sophistication.

The hackers compromised the networks of telecommunications com-

Anne Neuberger **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

panies to obtain customer call rec-ords and gain access to the private communications of what officials have said is a limited number of in-dividuals. Though the FBI has not publicly identified any of the victims, officials believe senior US gov-ernment officials and prominent political figures are among those whose communications were ac-cessed. Neuberger said Friday that officials did not yet have a precise sense how many Americans overall were affected by Salt Typhoon, in part because the Chinese were careful about their techniques, but that a "large number" were in the Washington-Virginia area. *—PTI*

Airstrike mistakenly kills 10 civilians: Nigeria

DAKAR, 28 DEC

PHOTO: X

An airstrike in northwestern Nigeria targeting an armed group has mistakenly resulted in the deaths of at least 10 civilians, the country's military reported on Friday. The incident occurred on Christmas Day when the Nigerian Air Force targeted a logistics base of the Lakurawa insurgent group in Sokoto state's Silame area. Defence spokesperson Edward Buba confirmed the air force aimed at the insurgents but reported that the civilians died due to "secondary explosions."

On Thursday, the Sokoto state government indicated that the air force had unintentionally shelled the villagers in an operation to displace the insurgents. The Lakurawa insurgent group, which began infil-trating Nigeria following destabilising coups in neighbouring countries, initially gained local support by assisting communities against cattle rustlers. However, it has since sought to enforce strict Islamic laws across border areas.

Last year, a drone attack by the military mistakenly killed at least 85 civilians during a religious gathering. Around 400 civilians have died from such strikes since 2017, while the ongoing conflict with Boko Haram has led to approximately 35,000 fatalities and over two million displaced individuals. *—AP*

Scindia meets FM to discuss Post's path to profit

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia has met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharam to discuss India Post's path to profitability, an official release said on Saturday. Scindia, along with officials from the Department of Posts, presented their capital expenditure demands to the finance minister to make it a profit centre by 2029. Scindia aims to make India Post globally competitive and has been leading Department-wide efforts to drive higher customer acquisition, retention and operational efficiency. During the meeting with the finance minister, Scindia presented a new development plan for India Post and said the department is working on rationalising costs and aiming to make most processes digital.—*PTI*

Vodafone pays ₹11,650 cr lenders' dues on VIL shares

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

UK-based Vodafone Group has cleared dues of around Rs 11,650 crore or about 109 million pound that it raised against shares of Vodafone Idea, according to a regulatory filing. Vodafone Group had pledged almost the entire stake in VIL to raise the debt. The pledge was created in favour of HSBC Corporate Trustee Company (UK) for the debt raised by Mauritius and India-based entities of Vodafone Group. The shares are valued at around Rs 11,649 crore as per the closing price of Rs 7.41 apiece of Vodafone Idea stock on Friday. Vodafone Group holds a 22.56 per cent stake, while the Aditya Birla Group holds 14.76 per cent. The government has a 23.15 per cent stake as of 30 September, 2024. —*PTI*

Rcube Projects opens ₹ 120 cr mall at Noida

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Realty firm Rcube Projects Pvt Ltd expects Rs 25-30 crore rental income annually from its new shopping mall in Noida, Delhi-NCR. The company -- which is into the development of commercial projects comprising retail and office spaces -- has opened 'Rcube Monad Mall' at Sector 43, Noida, Uttar Pradesh. On the new mall, Anuj Malhan, founder at Rcube Projects, said the shopping mall is spread over 2 acres with a total leasable area of 2.5 lakh square feet along with 300 car parking. Rcube Projects has invested Rs 120 crore to develop this mall. The mall also has a multiplex MovieMax Edition with a total seating capacity of 200 people. Lifestyle has taken on lease 45,000 sq ft retail space in this mall, he noted —*PTI*

Credila Financial Services files IPO papers with Sebi

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Education loans-focused lender Credila Financial Services Ltd, formerly known as HDFC Credila Financial Services Ltd, has filed papers with markets regulator Sebi for an initial public offering (IPO) through a confidential pre-filing route. The confidential pre-filing route allows the company to withhold public disclosure of details under the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). In a public announcement on Friday, Credila said it has "filed pre-draft red herring prospectus with the Sebi and stock exchanges ... in relation to the proposed initial public offering of its equity shares on the main board". A private equity consortium of EQT and ChrysCapital acquired a 90.01 per cent stake in Credila for Rs 9,060 crore, including a fresh equity infusion of Rs 2,003.61 crore. Of this, Rs 700 crore was infused in June 2023 by the erstwhile HDFC Ltd, while the remaining Rs 1,303.61 crore was contributed in March 2024 by EQT and ChrysCapital entities. The consortium valued Credila at a pre-money valuation of Rs 10,350 crore. —*PTI*

Reliance acquires Karkinos Healthcare for ₹375 crore

Karkinos had a turnover of ₹ 22 crore in 2022-23 fiscal

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has acquired technology-driven and oncology-focused healthcare platform Karkinos for Rs 375 crore, the firm said on Saturday.

Reliance Strategic Business Ventures (RSBVL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Mumbai-listed India's most valuable company, completed the acquisition of Karkinos Healthcare Pvt Ltd with allotment of requisite shares, the firm said in a stock exchange filing.

Karkinos was incorporated in India on 24 July, 2020, and is in the business of providing technology-driven innovative solutions for the early detection, diagnosis, and management of cancer. It had a turnover of about Rs 22 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal.

"Reliance Strategic Business Ventures Ltd has on 27 December, 2024, subscribed to and has been allotted 1 crore equity shares of Rs 10 each, for cash, aggregating Rs 10 crore and 36.5 crore optionally fully convertible debentures of Rs 10 each, for cash, aggregating Rs 365 crore of Karkinos," according to the filing.

Karkinos was incorporated in India on 24 July, 2020 PHOTO: PTI

Karkinos, it said, has cancelled the existing outstanding 30,075 equity shares held by the erstwhile shareholders of the company in accordance with the approved resolution plan.

It, however, did not give details.

The company is focused on providing end-to-end services relating to early detection and effective treatment of cancer at substantially lower than prevailing rates, while still generating healthy profitability. In order to meet this vision, Karkinos started partnering with hospitals to provide oncology services (testing, radiation therapy, etc.).

The resolution plan for Karkinos was approved by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Mumbai Bench, and no additional governmental or regulatory approvals were needed for the transaction, it added.

Earlier, on 10 December, Reliance announced that the NCLT had approved the resolution plan submitted by RSBVL for Karkinos under the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016. —*PTI*

TARGETS 1.5 BT BY 2030

India achieves record coal production of 997.83 MT

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

India achieved its highest-ever coal production of 997.826 million tonnes (MT) in the financial year 2023-24, reflecting a remarkable 11.71 per cent growth compared to 893.191 MT in 2022-23.

According to the Ministry of Coal, under the Integrated Coal Logistics Plan the government has targeted Coal production of 1.5BT by FY 2030. During the calendar year 2024 (up to December 15), coal production reached a provisional 988.32 MT, marking a year-on-year increase of 7.66 per cent.

Coal supplies also saw significant growth, with 963.11 MT provisionally supplied by 15 December, 2024, an increase of 6.47 per cent over the previous year. The power sector received 792.958 MT of coal, a 5.02 per cent rise, while the Non-Regulated Sector (NRS) saw a 14.48 per cent growth with 171.236 MT supplied.

PHOTO: PTI

Under the "Mission Coking Coal" initiative, the Ministry of Coal is targeting domestic raw coking coal production of 140 MT by 2030. For FY 2023-24, production stood at 66.821 MT, with a target of 77 MT set for FY 2024-25.

The Ministry has launched the Mine Closure Portal, developed by CMPDI and CIL, to oversee mine closure activities. —*ANI*

JSW Energy acquires 4,696 MW renewable platform from O2 power

MUMBAI, 28 DEC

JSW Neo Energy Limited, a subsidiary of JSW Energy Limited, has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire a renewable energy platform valued at approximately Rs 12,468 crore (around USD 1.47 billion) from O2 Power Pooling Pte. Ltd., marking its largest acquisition to date. The transaction, pending approval from the Competition Commission of India (CCI) and other regulatory bodies, encompasses O2 Power Midco Holdings Pte. Ltd. and O2 Energy SG Pte. Ltd. The platform boasts a total capacity of 4,696 MW, including 2,259 MW currently operational, 1,463 MW under construction, and 974 MW in the pipeline, with full operational capability expected by June 2027. JSW's acquisition will enhance its total locked-in generation capacity by 23 per cent, elevating it from 20,012 MW to 24,708 MW. The assets feature a blended average tariff of Rs 3.37 per KWh and a remaining lifespan of approximately 23 years, distributed across seven resource-rich states in India. Sharad Mahendra, Joint Managing Director and CEO of JSW Energy, expressed enthusiasm for the acquisition, emphasising its strategic significance in strengthening the company's position in India's energy sector. Pritesh Vinay, Director (Finance) and CFO, stated that the acquisition presents a compelling investment opportunity, aligning with JSW's commitment to prudent capital allocation and ambitious growth objectives. The transaction was supported by PwC, with legal counsel from Khaitan & Co and Herbert Smith, alongside financial and technical due diligence conducted by KPMG and Wind Guard, respectively. —*ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Zydus Wellness gets ₹56.33 cr GST demand

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Zydus Wellness Ltd on Saturday said its wholly-owned arm has received a GST demand of Rs 56.33 crore, along with applicable interest and penalty from the tax authority.

Zydus Wellness Products Ltd (ZWPL), a wholly-owned subsidiary company, has received an intimation from the Directorate General of Goods and Services Tax Intelligence, Surat Zonal Unit, alleging GST demand of Rs 56.33 crore, along with applicable interest and penalty, Zydus Wellness Ltd said in a regulatory filing.

The intimation alleges that the GST was payable in relation to the acquisition of intellectual property rights from Heinz Italia SPA by Heinz India Pvt Ltd, now merged with ZWPL, it added.

The period covered by the order relates to the pre-acquisition period prior to January 30, 2019, the filing said.

Due to this order, there is no impact on financial, operation or other activities of the company/ZWPL, it added.

The impact will be limited to the final tax liability as may be ascertained, along with interest and penalty, if any and is eligible for indemnification by Heinz Italia S.P.A., the company said. —*PTI*

India's electronics sector targets 12M jobs by 2027

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

India's electronics industry is poised for significant transformation, targeting a manufacturing output of USD 500 billion by 2030, as outlined in a TeamLease report. Achieving this ambitious goal will necessitate a fivefold expansion over the next five years to address a USD 400 billion production shortfall. Currently, domestic production is at USD 101 billion, with mobile phones accounting for 43 per cent of this figure.

Other significant contributors include consumer and industrial electronics (12 per cent each), electronic components (11 per cent), and emerging sectors such as auto electronics (8 per cent) and LED lighting (3 per cent). This projected growth could lead to the creation of 12 million jobs by 2027, comprising 3 million direct roles and 9 million indirect positions.

However, the industry faces a critical talent gap, with a pressing need for skilled professionals in areas like semiconductors and electromechanical parts. To bridge this divide, workforce skills must align with industry requirements —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

CHENNAI TAX OFFICIALS INSPECT M&M RECORDS

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd on Saturday said state tax authorities in Tamil Nadu initiated an inspection of records at one of the places of its business operations in Chennai.

Authorisation for inspection/search proceedings under CGST Act 2017 was issued by Additional Commissioner (ST), Intelligence-I (FAC), Chennai-6 on the company, M&M said in a regulatory filing. Subsequently, the State Tax officer, Gr-I, Intelligence - I, Chennai - 6, initiated an inspection of the records at one of the places of business operations of the company in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, it added. The authorisation for inspection/search proceedings dated December 26, 2024, was shown to the company's officials on December 27, 2024, at around 12.15 pm, it added. —*PTI*

India's gold import surge pushes CAD over 2%

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

India's Current Account Deficit (CAD) is expected to rise above 2 per cent of GDP in the third quarter of FY25, driven by a surge in gold imports, according to a report by Bank of Baroda.

However, resilient services exports and remittance inflows are likely to cushion the overall impact, keeping the CAD for FY25 within a manageable range of 1.2 per cent-1.5 per cent of GDP.

India's CAD narrowed slightly to 1.2 per cent of GDP in Q2 FY25, compared to 1.3 per cent in the same period last year.

Higher CAD is also because of increased trade deficit, the merchandise trade deficit widened to USD 75.3 billion in Q2 FY25 from USD 64.5 billion in Q2 FY24. The increase was largely attributed to higher non-oil imports, with gold imports rising by USD 5 billion year-on-year.

In contrast, the services sector emerged as a bright spot, with net services balance increasing to USD 44.5 billion in Q2 FY25, up from USD 39.9 billion in the previous year. Software and business services exports were particularly strong, while private remittances grew to USD 29.3 billion, further supporting CAD containment.

On the capital account front, India recorded a surplus of USD 11.9 billion in Q2 FY25, compared to USD 10.3 billion in Q2 FY24.

The sharp rise in Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) inflows, which surged to USD 19.9 billion from USD 4.9 billion last year, played key role.

Non-resident Indian (NRI) deposits and External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs) also contributed positively, offsetting increased Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) outflows. —*ANI*

PHOTO: X

- India's CAD narrowed slightly to 1.2 per cent of GDP in Q2 FY25, compared to 1.3 per cent in the same period last year

Royalty rate & minerals auction are key initiatives for 2024-25

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

In a strategic move to boost economic growth, the Indian government has implemented significant amendments to mining regulations and successfully auctioned 24 critical mineral blocks across four tranches, according to the Ministry of Mines' year-end review for 2024.

The key changes include the revision of the Second Schedule of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR) of 1957, adjusting royalty rates for twelve critical and strategic minerals, such as Beryllium, Cobalt, Gallium, and Titanium. Additionally, updates to vital regulations—such as the Minerals (Other than Atomic and Hydrocarbons Energy Mineral) Concession Rules-2016—aim to streamline mineral exploration.

PHOTO: X

As of 10 December, 2024, a total of 88 mineral blocks have been auctioned, while the National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET) has greenlit 120 exploration projects totalling INR 609.54 crore. In a bid to diversify exploration efforts, 28 private exploration agencies have been notified, fostering greater private sector participation. Moreover, the Union Budget 2024-25 has announced the establishment of a Critical Mineral Mission, aimed at enhancing domestic production, recycling, and securing overseas mineral assets, signifying a robust commitment to the nation's mining sector. —*ANI*

'India's IPO mkt poised for record growth in 2025'

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

India's initial public offering (IPO) market has marked a historic achievement, with proceeds soaring from USD 5.5 billion in 2023 to USD 11.2 billion in 2024, according to a GlobalData report.

Key IPOs in 2024 included Hyundai Motor's USD 3.3 billion offering, Swiggy's USD 1.3 billion issue, and NTPC Green Energy's USD 1.2 billion IPO, among others.

Notably, India emerged as the top performer in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region, with over 200 companies going public.

The APAC IPO market as a whole also saw significant activity, recording 604 IPOs that raised a total of USD 33.9 billion—a 21.5 per cent increase compared to 2023. Japan experienced remarkable growth with a 275.1 per cent increase, generating USD 12.6 billion from 69 IPOs, while Malaysia saw a 145.9 per cent rise with 36 IPOs and USD 1.1 billion raised. Conversely, China faced a notable decline in IPO activity, with a 51.3 per cent drop, resulting in just over USD 5.2 billion from 64 IPOs. —*ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

AMID RISING IMPORTS

Steel sector seeks policy initiatives for 2025

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Hit hard by surging imports, the Indian steel industry will be keenly eyeing policy initiatives in 2025 to safeguard its interests as it moves ahead with the 300 MnT capacity target amid volatile raw material prices.

Another challenge in front of the industry will be to expedite its efforts to transition to clean manufacturing processes with the government's push to green steel production amid global thrust on cutting greenhouse gas emissions in hard-to-abate sectors.

The government intervention will be essential as the Indian steel industry is in expansion mode to build a manufacturing capacity of 300 MnTPA by 2030 and would need investments worth around Rs 10 lakh crore to add the remaining 120 MnT capacity to achieve the target.

PHOTO: X

According to the Ministry of Steel, India remained a net importer of steel, with imports in April-September FY25 outpacing exports by a wider margin.

In the April-September 2024 period, imports rose over 41 per cent to 4.70 million tonnes (MnT) from 3.33 MnT in the six-month period of the last fiscal. Exports came down by 36 per cent to 2.31 MnT from 3.60 MnT in April-September FY24, official data showed.

In 2024, India's crude steel capacity is estimated to be 180 MnT, up from 164 MnT in 2023. Production is expected to be 146 MnT in 2024, higher than 130 MnT in 2023. Consumption is likely to be 145 MnT over 140 MnT in 2023.

In 2025, the industry expects capacity to be 195 MnT, production 158 MnT and consumption 155 MnT.

Meanwhile, hot rolled coil (HRC) prices continued to fall from Rs 48,000/tonne at the end of Q2 to Rs 47,000/tonne in December —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Ace rider Muddappa eyes more titles after 13 wins

CHENNAI, 28 DEC

Ace Indian rider Hemanth Muddappa of Mantra Racing, who has sealed one more championship title this year with a round to spare, will be gunning for more when he hits the track in the fourth and final round of MMSC FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship near here on Sunday. Mudappa had bagged his 12th National title last year. With an unbeatable lead of 29 points, the Bengaluru rider sealed the title in the 4-storke 1051 to 1650cc Super Sport class for his 13th title and he is taking part in three more classes, with a chance to increase his kitty. Despite being the most-decorated drag rider combination of Muddappa and Mantra Racing are hungry for more. *—PTI*

Aston Villa fails to overturn Duran's red card

BIRMINGHAM, 28 DEC

Aston Villa says it has failed in an attempt to have Jhon Duran's red card at Newcastle overturned on appeal. The 21-year-old Colombia international was sent off 32 minutes into a 3-0 defeat in the Premier League at St James' Park on Thursday after appearing to stamp on defender Fabian Schar, prompting a furious reaction from Villa head coach Unai Emery, who later indicated that the club would appeal. However, Villa said on Friday night that its bid was unsuccessful and the forward will now serve a three-match ban for violent conduct. Duran will miss Premier League games against Brighton and Leicester, followed by Villa's FA Cup third-round match with West Ham on 10 January. *—PTI*

Joaquin confirms entry in Int'l Series India

GURUGRAM, 28 DEC

In-form LIV Golf superstar Joaquin Niemann, The International Series Rankings champion for the 2024 season, is the latest big name to be confirmed for International Series India, the USD 2 million tournament taking place at DLF Golf and Country Club next month. The Chilean, who captains the Torque GC team on the LIV Golf League, will join defending US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau of the USA and local hero Anirban Lahiri for the tournament which will take place from 30 January to 2 February on the iconic Gurugram course. Niemann was runner-up in the LIV Golf League individual standings in an impressive 2024 season, winning two of the first three tournaments in Mayakoba and Jeddah, and clinching two T2 and two T3 places as he narrowly lost out to two-time major champion Jon Rahm. *—ANI*

Yuva Kabaddi: Chandigarh reaches top spot

COIMBATORE, 28 DEC

The fifth day of the 11th Yuva Kabaddi Series Division 2 at the Karpagam Academy of Higher Education witnessed exciting action as teams fought for the top 2 spots. The day began with Chandigarh Chargers overpowering Panchala Pride 47-27. Dinesh stole the spotlight with a Super 10, while Gurmeet Dalal and Lakshay contributed with High 5s in defence. Panchala Pride's Aditya Kumar and Rahul Kumar managed eight points each but couldn't stop the Chargers' onslaught. The day concluded with Vizag Victors defeating Sindh Sonics 50-39 in a high-scoring encounter. Samara Simha Reddy Gunimini delivered a stellar performance with 19 raid points, receiving solid support from his teammates. *—ANI*

Reddy's maiden ton keeps India afloat

Gutsy Nitish Reddy's unbeaten 105 took India to 358/9 on Day 3 of Boxing Day Test

MELBOURNE, 28 DEC

Nitish Reddy, an unknown entity in red ball cricket before the start of Border-Gavaskar series, virtually bailed India out with his dogged maiden Test century here on Saturday, severely denting Australia's hopes of winning the Boxing Day contest.

Reddy's unbeaten 105 took India to 358 for nine, still 116 runs short of Australia's first innings score of 474 as rain brought an early end to the third day's play.

With the flat MCG deck not offering much to the bowlers, saving the Test match shouldn't be a big deal for India. Reddy, easily India's 'find of the series', played a pivotal role in visitors' fightback.

Reddy's combative spirit and the invaluable 127-run stand he shared with Washington Sundar (50 off 162 balls) proved to be the turning point for the hosts.

Reddy's innings was termed as one of greatest Test knocks by the legendary Sunil Gavaskar given the situation as India were in a precarious position after Rishab Pant's dismissal courtesy a rash shot had left India tottering at 191 for six.

The young Andhra batter could have been stranded on 99 when Jasprit Bumrah got dismissed, leaving Reddy with last-man in Mohammed Siraj, who walked in to another round of boos and faced three deliveries from home skipper Pat Cummins.

Both Reddy and his father Muthyala's expressions changed with each ball but Siraj survived to allow Reddy savour the moment he must have dreamt a thousand times.

A picture-perfect straight drive off Scott Boland was the moment of the series for India as Reddy balanced his helmet with the bat and took a knee, expressing his gratitude towards the Indian dug-out which gave him a standing ovation.

The 21-year-had struck the 'Pushpa' pose after completing his fifty and aced the dramatic 'Bahubali' pose to celebrate the century.

If the morning was more about Rishabh Pant's inexplicable shot selection, the afternoon session belonged to Reddy, whose attacking game put the pressure right back on Australia. The third day's MCG track is perhaps the best to bat on with green grass making way for a brownish tinge and an old Kookaburra hardly doing anything. *—PTI*

Nitish Reddy after his ton against Australia on Saturday PHOTO: X

> **Pant let team down with stupid shot; Reddy's knock one of the greatest**
>
> -Sunil Gavaskar

'I could have got Konstas out 6-7 times'

Jasprit Bumrah said on Saturday he "never felt" he was far away from a wicket even as Australia's 19-year-old Test debutant Sam Konstas went after India's champion pacer in what is a rare sight in international cricket. Bumrah said it was an interesting battle against Konstas on the opening day of the fourth Test but believed he could have got the batter out six-seven times in the first two overs. Konstas hit Bumrah for two sixes during his knock. *—PTI*

'No surprise if Kohli & Konstas share smiling pic'

MELBOURNE, 28 DEC

Sam Konstas's competitive nature aligns with that of Virat Kohli and it would not be surprising if the two share a laugh about the shoulder-barging episode before posing for a photo after the Boxing Day Test, reckoned former Australia pacer Stuart Clark.

Kohli had intentionally bumped Konstas during the ongoing fourth Test at Melbourne, an act for which he copped a 20 percent fine from the ICC, besides getting booed by the Australian fans.

"He's (Konstas) a competitor. He wants to compete. He wants to do well. So, from that point of view, I think that incident (shoulder-barging) that happened in history, I think what you'll find is, I wouldn't be surprised if (Virat) Kohli takes him under his wing," Clark told PTI.

"And there'll be a photo of them after the game, smiling and laughing about it. He won't take a backward step. No one expects Kohli to either. No one expects anyone to take a backward step. It was just not a great incident," he added. *—PTI*

Virat Kohli and Australia's Sam Kontas PHOTO: X

Olympian Mirabai Chanu's mentor Vijay Sharma says the Doha performance was promising and signals "a bright future for India PHOTO: X

After Asian success, India's weightlifters eye CWG 2026

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

- The weightlifting competition in Qatar featured 40 categories – 20 each in youth and junior levels. Medals were awarded for snatch, clean and jerk and overall sections in each of 40 categories

India's medal-winning athletes are aiming to reach higher levels in the new year after their impressive show at 19-25 December Asian youth and junior weightlifting championships in Doha.

Overall, India won 33 medals across youth and junior categories.

The next target for the lifters is Glasgow Commonwealth Games 2026 qualification and national weightlifting coach and Olympian Mirabai Chanu's mentor Vijay Sharma says the Doha performance was promising and signals "a bright future for India."

The weightlifting competition in Qatar featured 40 categories – 20 each in youth and junior levels. Medals were awarded for snatch, clean and jerk and overall sections in each of the 40 categories.

India's youth (13-17 years) lifters won 21 medals, including seven golds. The juniors (15-20 years) won 12 medals.

Uttar Pradesh's 16-year-old Jyoshna Sabar was among the standout performers in Doha. She created an Asian record in the women's youth 40kg class with a combined lift of 135 kgs. This reiterated Sharma's thoughts that "India's women had greater prospects of winning international medals."

Khelo India's mission to tap grassroots talent and then groom them into potential winners at the international stage got a major boost as out of the 24 men and women who represented India at Doha, 22 were from their stable.

Among the men, Sairaj Pardeshi, a camper of NIS Patiala, created a new national record in the overall lift, as he lifted 310kg (139kg snatch + 171kg clean and jerk) in the 81kg men's youth category. *—PTI*

ROUND 9 DONE

Arjun in joint lead in World Rapid and Blitz Chess

NEW YORK, 28 DEC

Indian Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi has emerged as one of four co-leaders following an impressive performance at the ongoing World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championship. After the second day and completion of Round 9, Arjun stands alongside Russian players Volodar Murzin and Alexander Grischuk, as well as Poland's Duda Jan-Kryzstof, each with seven points.

The day was not without controversy, however, as five-time world champion Magnus Carlsen faced a fine and subsequent disqualification for violating FIDE's dress code by wearing jeans. The defending champion was fined USD 200 after refusing to change his attire upon request from chief arbiter Alex Holowczak. With Carlsen's withdrawal, Arjun's chances have brightened significantly, given the Norwegian's dominance in faster formats of the game. In Round 10, Arjun will face Grischuk.

In the women's section, Indian contender Koneru Humpy has rebounded from an early loss to win four consecutive matches, now leading with 6.5 points alongside compatriot D Harika and China's Wenjun Ju. The next match between Humpy and Ju is anticipated to be pivotal.

Arjun's notable victories included defeating Robson Ray of the United States and Shant Sargsyan of Armenia, with draws against Murzin and Duda contributing to his standing at the top with four rounds remaining. *—PTI*

Indian Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi PHOTO: X

NZ FIGHT BACK TO BEAT SL BY 8 RUNS IN 1ST T20I

MOUNT MAUNGANUNI , 28 DEC

Daryl Mitchell and Michael Bracewell made half-centuries in a 105-run sixth wicket partnership to help lead New Zealand to an eight-run win over Sri Lanka on Saturday in the first of three T20 Internationals.

Outstanding bowling at the death also turned the match in New Zealand's favor as Sri Lanka slumped from 121-0 to 164-8 in reply to New Zealand's 172-8.

Mitchell made 62 and Bracewell 59 in a partnership lasting only 60 balls, after coming together with New Zealand in trouble at 65-5 when Wanindu Hasaranga dismissed Glenn Phillips and Mitchell Hay with consecutive deliveries in the 10th over.

New Zealand's total looked inadequate as Pathum Nissanka made 90 in 60 balls and shared a 121-run opening stand with Kusal Mendis which seemed to have set up Sri Lanka for a comfortable win. *—PTI*

Arsenal climbs to 2nd place in Premier League

Mikel Arteta's side remains six points behind league leaders Liverpool PHOTO: X

LONDON, 28 DEC

Arsenal climbed to second place in the Premier League following a 1-0 victory against Ipswich Town at the Emirates Stadium on Friday. Mikel Arteta's side remains six points behind league leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand.

Ipswich, sitting second-bottom, struggled from the outset and failed to register a single touch in Arsenal's penalty area during the first half. Although they improved slightly after the break, it was Arsenal that maintained control throughout the match, with Declan Rice in midfield.

The Gunners' lone goal came from Kai Havertz midway through the first half, as he dispatched a cross from Leandro Trossard. Despite numerous opportunities for Havertz, Rice, Mikel Merino, Martin Ødegaard, and Gabriel Jesus to extend the lead, Arsenal's tally remained unchanged. "It's so tough, every team is tough to break down," said Havertz. "They fight for each other, and at the end, we're very proud of win."

In a separate fixture, Brighton & Hove Albion battled to a frustrating 0-0 draw with Brentford, extending their winless streak to six matches. *—PTI*

DRESS CODE VIOLATION

Carlsen disqualified from top chess meet

NEW YORK, 28 DEC

Five-time world champion Magnus Carlsen has been disqualified from the World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championship in New York due to a breach of the tournament's dress code. Carlsen was fined USD 200 for wearing jeans, which are explicitly banned under tournament regulations.

The defending champion was not paired for Round 9 of the Rapid championship at Wall Street. Despite agreeing to comply with the dress code from the next day, Carlsen was unwilling to change his attire immediately, leading to his ejection from the event. Reflecting on his disqualification, Carlsen quipped, "I would rather be at someplace with better weather."

In a statement, the global governing body FIDE asserted that the dress code was clearly communicated to all participants prior to the tournament and aims to uphold professionalism. "Today, Mr. Magnus Carlsen breached the dress code... Unfortunately, Mr. Carlsen declined, and as a result, he was not paired for round nine," FIDE stated.

Earlier in the tournament, Russian Grandmaster Ian Nepomniachtchi faced a similar penalty but complied by changing his clothing. Carlsen, feeling "upset" by the incident, announced he would not compete in the Blitz section, stating, "I am pretty tired of FIDE, so I want no more of this."

This controversy highlights Carlsen's desire to promote faster chess formats and innovate the game, as he recently raised USD 12 million for developing "freestyle chess," a concept akin to ideas from legendary player Bobby Fischer. *—PTI*

Despite agreeing to comply with dress code, Carlsen was unwilling to change his attire immediately, leading to his ejection PHOTO: X

> **Two world No.1s both getting done for doping is disgusting for our sport. It's a horrible look**
>
> -Nick Kyrgios, Tennis player

Yogesh calls out Khel Ratna Panel for snubbing him

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Two-time Paralympic silver medallist Yogesh Kathuniya has expressed his dismay at not receiving a nomination for the prestigious Khel Ratna Award, despite his impressive track record in international competitions.

In an exclusive interview with PTI, Kathuniya articulated his frustrations regarding what he deemed favouritism and a lack of transparency in the award selection process. "I don't know what criteria they have set," he lamented. "I filled out the form and achieved the highest aggregate marks, yet I wasn't nominated again."

He highlighted discrepancies in past selections, recalling that he had been nominated for the Arjuna Award without submitting an application after his previous successes. "Why can't that policy apply this time?" he questioned.

Despite winning six medals in total at various championships, Kathuniya noted societal perceptions regarding medal value, stating, "When there are three positions – gold, silver, and bronze – why is only gold valued?"

He called for recognition not just for himself but for all deserving athletes, urging authorities to prioritise accomplishments over social media popularity. "Give it to everyone who deserves it; count our achievements, not our social media reach."

He also condemned the delay in announcing the winners, pointing out that the final list was completed on 15 December but has yet to be disclosed. *—PTI*